MEMOIRS
OF DR.
JOHNSON

1785

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OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF THE LATE

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON.

[Price Two Shillings and Sixpence.]

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OF THE LATE

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON;

CONTAINING

Many valuable ORIGINAL LETTERS, and several INTERESTING ANECDOTES both of his LITERARY and SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.

THE WHOLE AUTHENTICATED BY LIVING EVIDENCE.

There has perhaps rarely passed a Life of which a judicious and faithful Narrative would not be useful.

RAMBLER.

LONDON:

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1785.

ALEXANDER
1883
GARDYNE

PREFACE.

BESIDES the facts already before the public, the Editor of theſe *Memoirs* has been favoured with the contributions of thoſe who were long the friends of Doctor Samuel Johnſon.

His ſervants, Mrs. Du Maulin, who knew him from her infancy, and ſeveral others of his moſt intimate acquaintance, whoſe names the Editor is not allowed to mention, told him all they knew.

The late Mr. Thomas Davies, of Covent-Garden, who lived long in habits of friendſhip with the Doctor, not only aſſiſted the Editor in detecting ſeveral errors, in other accounts of his life, but authenticated to him many facts, which ſeemed otherwiſe doubtful. This Gentleman had collected many anecdotes of his friend, but would not mention them, he ſaid, to any perſon whatever, as he might probably have occaſion to uſe them himſelf.

But

But the principal, and moſt valuable communications in this work, are from Mr. Elphinſton, who, with ſingular readineſs and affability, gave the Editor every ſort of information which he could deſire; and the reader may eaſily conceive how much might be gleaned by a perſon of his intelligence and diſcernment, during a correſpondence of the greateſt intimacy for above the ſpace of thirty years. The letters and anecdotes, here publiſhed, will ſhew how much, how ſincerely, and for what a length of time, theſe congenial characters regarded each other.

The facts relating to the Oſſian controverſy are anonymous, unleſs the authenticity of any of them ſhould be challenged; in that caſe the author will avow them, as the means of defence are fully in his power.

MEMOIRS

OF

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON.

THE late Dr. Samuel Johnſon, whoſe ſtory I am now to relate, like every one who arrives at extreme age, ſurvived all his earlier and moſt of his later acquaintance.

This man was grown grey in literature. He lived in the capacity of an author on

the town for a period of near fifty years. The viciſſitudes and fortunes of ſuch a ſituation, protracted to ſuch a length of time, it were impoſſible even for thoſe who knew him beſt, to trace with accuracy or ſtate with preciſion.

The anecdotes of his juvenile days have periſhed with the companions of his youth. Few intereſt themſelves in the hiſtory of a man without property, fame or conſequence. Johnſon was for many years loſt in a multitude of authors, who are occupied only in collecting the occurrences of the day, poliſhing into form the fugitive ideas of bookſellers, or in ſome of the numerous periodical works which engroſs ſo much of the trade, furniſhing ſubjects of freſh ſpeculation for the public mind.

And

And it was not till he derived peculiar luſtre from a long ſeries of ſucceſs in his literary purſuits, that he became an object of general attention and enquiry.

It is now thirty years ſince he lamented on publiſhing his Dictionary, that *moſt of thoſe whom he wiſhed to pleaſe were ſunk into the grave.* Nor is it when thus loaded with the frailties of age, and tottering under the accumulated decays of nature, that any man is much inclined to multiply connections or commence friendſhips. So great and univerſal however was the eſtimation which his virtuous principles and eminent talents at laſt procured, that of late it has been deemed a ſort of literary diſcredit not to rank in the number of his

acquaintance, his admirers, or his imitators.

Men diſtinguiſhed by induſtry or genius as Johnſon was, in morals, arts, ſciences, or letters, ſerve the purpoſes of public utility in a double capacity. Their example ſtimulates thoſe around them to exertion and perſeverance in virtue or excellence. Poſterity contemplate alſo with a mixture of reverence and emulation, the copy of an original which their anceſtors were thus contented to follow and applaud.

By exhauſting a long laborious life in contributing to the improvement and delight of his countrymen, Johnſon finally merited and obtained their general and unfeigned approbation. His enlightened mind, which aimed only at the happineſs and perfection

fection of the ſpecies, was conſtantly emitting ſuch effuſions of virtuous intelligence as tended equally to clear the head and better the heart; and when his death, which had been ſome time expected, was announced, moſt of his contemporaries regarded the melancholy event with a conſternation or ſenſibility ſimilar to that of a family who has loſt its head, or an army whoſe general falls.

This accounts for that extreme avidity with which every veſtige of his genius, his taſte, or his humour, is ſtill received by a grateful public. And it will be long before any work, in which he had the leaſt concern, can be indifferent to them. His tranſcendent abilities, and tried virtues, his oddities, which were alike original and

abundant; the variety of his friends, and the length of his life, give ſo many ſhapes to his ſtory, and ſuch different complexions to the prompt and occaſional ebullitions of his wit in different ſituations, that whoever had the honour of his acquaintance muſt be in poſſeſſion of materials which, for the ſake of literature and poſterity, ought to be recorded.

LITCHFIELD

LITCHFIELD in Staffordſhire is now very well known to be the place of Johnſon's birth; a circumſtance which may probably be recollected by poſterity, when this ancient city, like others which have been made immortal by giving birth to great men, is forgotten.

It appears from the pariſh regiſter, that Johnſon was born in the month of September, 1709. His father kept a ſhop near the market-place, and chiefly dealt in books, ſtationary ware, and book-binding; articles which, eſpecially in a country ſituation, where literature is but rarely an amuſement, and never a buſineſs, could not be very profitable. It was from this circumſtance, that Johnſon was enabled

to ſay, as he often did, that he could bind a book very well.

Old Mr. Johnſon, therefore, whoſe ſtory being thus blended with that of his ſon, becomes an object of ſome attention, might be reputable, but could not be rich. He was a man of reſerved manners, but of acknowledged ſhrewdneſs. From habits of ſteadineſs and punctuality he acquired great perſonal reſpectability. The oldeſt people in the place would often tell the Doctor, who heard them with a ſenſible ſatisfaction, that his father continued to the laſt ſuch a favourite among the boys, that he was perhaps the only one in town who never received any injury from their petulance and miſchief. And it was ſaid by himſelf, whoſe regards were incapable of betraying

traying him into the flattery even of a parent, that *he was no careleſs obſerver of the paſſages of the times in which he lived.* His intellectual abilities unimproved and called forth by no intereſt or emergency, were notwithſtanding perhaps but moderate, as it does not follow, that becauſe the ſon made a figure, the father ſhould be a prodigy. But that he preſerved himſelf by his induſtry and attention in a ſtate of honeſty and independence, that he had prudence enough by no ſchemes or ſpeculations of any kind to injure his credit with his neighbours, and that whatever diſappointments and croſſes occurred in his intercourſe with the world, he diſcovered the ſame innate fund of ſatisfaction and chearfulneſs which marked the moſt proſperous circumſtances of his life,

life, are particulars well known, and it is all we do know with certainty about him.

Even in the town of Litchfield, however, where ſo little is to be made by the practice, we find him letting out part of his houſe in lodgings. Theſe at the time of Johnſon's birth were occupied by a Mr. Swynfen, who had a very pretty country-houſe on an eſtate of his own a few miles diſtant from Litchfield, where he practiſed phyſic, and where for that reaſon he provided himſelf with occaſional accommodation. He was a man of conſiderable reputation in his profeſſion as a phyſician, but was ſtill more eminent for the liberality of his mind and the goodneſs of his heart. This gentleman, having ſtood godfather for the child, intereſted himſelf not a little in

whatever

whatever related to his ſubſequent tuition. Though perhaps not affluent he was in eaſy circumſtances, and being of a friendly and ſuſceptible nature, took an early liking to young Johnſon, the firſt openings of whoſe genius he ſuperintended himſelf with much ſatisfaction and confidence. Theſe, though neither ſparkling nor premature, as Johnſon was always rather ſolid and ſaturnine, than volatile or forward, were yet ſo entirely original and ſpontaneous, as to afford ſufficient indications that his talents were not unhappily turned for literature and ſcience.

He imbibed the elements of erudition at the free grammar-ſchool of Litchfield. A Mr. Hunter had then the direction of the ſchool. To this gentleman's elegant and

correct

correct method of teaching, the Doctor has often acknowledged the higheſt obligations. It was a circumſtance he always mentioned with pleaſure, that the place of his education had produced a Wollaſton, a Newton, a Willis, a Garrick, and a Hawkeſworth. The two laſt particularly, whoſe names are not unknown to fame, though a few years younger, were both his ſchool-fellows, who then contracted that regard for his character, and confidence in his talents and worth, which afterwards diſpoſed them ſo readily to liſt among his pupils and friends. For juvenile attachments often continue to operate through life, and are generally the laſt to which ſuſceptible minds become inſenſible.

Thus

Thus ſituated, Johnſon entered on the initials of learning, with an eagerneſs equally perſevering and unſatiable. His exterior was always ſluggiſh, and he never did any thing which had the leaſt appearance of gracefulneſs, taſte, dexterity, or diſpatch. Even in the act of devouring the ſublimeſt paſſages of ancient literature, one who knew him not, would have thought him aſleep with the book in his hand. But though his diligence diſcovered no ardour, his perſeverance was ſo ſingular and exemplary, that all attempts to divert him from the taſk aſſigned, or which he aſſigned to himſelf, were uniformly without effect. The rapacity with which he commenced his primary purſuit, and graſped at every object of claſſical intelligence, is obvious from

from the ſtubbornneſs of a peculiar habit which he then contracted. To his dying day, he never thought, recollected, or ſtudied, whether in his cloſet, or in the ſtreet, alone, or in company, without putting his huge unweildy body, in the ſame rolling, aukward poſture, in which he was in uſe, while conning his grammar, or conſtruing his leſſon, to ſit on the form at ſchool.

He is ſaid, when a mere ſchool-boy, to have read indefatigably, and probably picked up no deſpicable acquaintance with books, by occaſionally attending his father's ſhop. Here he was, not unfrequently, ſo abſorbed by his predilection for the claſſical lore of antiquity, as entirely to neglect the buſineſs he had in truſt. Being often chid for diſobliging ſome of the beſt

beſt of his father's cuſtomers and friends, in this manner, he replied with great ſhrewdneſs, *that to ſuperſede the pleaſures of reading, by the attentions of traffic, was a taſk he never could maſter.*

It was, undoubtedly, by lounging here, that he heard many of thoſe biographical and literary anecdotes, which he has ſince detailed, with ſo much elegance and vivacity, in his *Lives of the Poets*. To ſuch a mind as Johnſon's, thus early ſmitten with the love of ſcience and philoſophy, every thing connected with men of genius and letters, we may well believe, would be eagerly devoured, and tenaciouſly retained. And it is remarkable, in what an exuberant vein of manly ſenſibility, thoſe particulars,

culars, which he ſays, *were told him* when a boy, occaſionally break from him.

We are not informed at whoſe expence he was ſent to college. His godfather, Dr. Swynfen, was likely enough to be conſulted on this occaſion. And the gentlemen in the neighbourhood, prompted by his example and zeal, and ſenſible of the father's inability and the ſon's genius, probably agreed among themſelves, on ſome mode of thus finiſhing an education, from which they predicted much public utility. He was entered, however, of Pembroke-college, Oxford, October 31, 1728. Here he ſtudied ſeveral terms, and might have continued longer; nor left the univerſity, as he certainly did, without any degree, but that he could not afford,

either

either to continue, or to pay for thoſe honours, to which his proficiency as a ſcholar muſt have otherwiſe entitled him.

His conduct, during no long reſidence in that illuſtrious ſeminary, is but little known, or at leaſt has been marked by no celebrity. He is ſaid to have treated ſome of the tutors with diſreſpect, their lectures with negligence, and the rules of the college with rudeneſs and contumely. But this ſtory, beſides being ſupported by no authority, does not ſuit the tenor of the Doctor's behaviour, who at the ſame time that he deſpiſed the rules or ceremonies of faſhion, in his deportment among the idle, the whimſical, the gay, or the affectedly polite, regarded with reverence every form

C or

or regulation, which had inſtruction or utility for its object.

In ſuch a ſituation Johnſon could not be idle. It was here he contemplated the wiſdom of antiquity, and ſtored his capacious memory with whatever is valuable on record. He was formed by nature for a ſedentary and recluſe life. His ſtrongeſt habits were thoſe of indolence and auſterity. All his ſubſequent exertions originated, not in his own choïce, but in ſtern neceſſity. Labour appeared to him impracticable whenever it was poſſible to be idle. He had not yet commenced author, nor thought of the profeſſion. His performances then could only be ſuch college exerciſes as he could not avoid. Some of theſe were much admired and are ſtill remembered. He par-

particularly tranſlated Pope's Meſſiah into elegant Latin verſe, which afterwards appeared in a volume of poems, publiſhedby one Huſband.

It is ſuppoſed that he remained between two and three years at college, which he left for the place of an uſher to a free-ſchool at Market Boſworth in Leiceſterſhire. This laborious capacity he ſuſtained much longer than was expected by any who knew him. All his leiſure time was employed aſſiduouſly in the purſuit of intellectual acquiſition and amuſement; and who can ſay what might have been the conſequence of his continuing for life in ſuch a ſituation. Some may ſuppoſe his works to have gained in quality what they might have wanted in quantity. It can hard-

ly be conceived, he would not have produced ſome memorial of his genius. But it would be raſh to ſay, that ſuch a production muſt have ſurpaſſed in excellence, the moſt finiſhed of thoſe pieces which actually fell from his pen. How very few gentlemen authors have ever arrived at any ſuperlative diſtinction or eminence. Writing is an art which can only be acquired by practice. Lyttleton, Cheſterfield, Hume, Robertſon, and Gibbons, though by means of an independent ſituation, were never in pay to bookſellers, accuſtomed themſelves to literary compoſitions from their infancy. Johnſon, therefore, immerſed in a ſchool might have publiſhed leſs, but except he had written much, he could not, with all the advantages of leiſure, retirement, and

plenty,

plenty, have written ſo well as he did, amidſt the inceſſant buſtle of a town life, expoſed to the conſtant intruſions of the idle and officious, and precipitated by the frequent preſſure of impending want.

Here, by the example and advice, probably of his friend and maſter, Anthony Blackwall, he formed the plan of eſtabliſhing an academy of his own. "Previous "however to the accompliſhment of this "project, we find him reſiding at Bir-"mingham, in the houſe of one Warren, "a printer. His firſt eſſays are ſaid to "have been written for a news-paper, pub-"liſhed hy his landlord, and that he "wrote while here, *A Voyage to Abyſſinia*, "*by Father Jerome Lobo, a Portugueſe* "*Jeſuit*; *with a Continuation of the Hiſtory*

" *of Abyſſinia down to the Beginning of the*
" *eighteenth Century*; *and Fifteen Diſſer-*
" *tations on various Subjects, relating to*
" *the Hiſtory, Antiquities, Government, Re-*
" *ligion, Manners, and Natural Hiſtory of*
" *Abyſſinia, and other Countries mentioned*
" *by Father Jerome Lobo. By Mr. Le*
" *Grand.* He wrote at the ſame time and
" in the ſame place, *Verſes on a Lady's*
" *preſenting a Sprig of Myrtle to a Gentle-*
" *man*, which have been re-printed in ſe-
" veral miſcellanies, under the name of
" Mr. Hammond. They were, as the
" Doctor declared, very late in life, writ-
" ten for a friend, who was deſirous of
" having, at leaſt from his miſtreſs, the
" reputation of a poet."

I give

I give this anecdote to the reader as it appeared in one of our monthly publications. It was incorporated with an account of Johnſon's life, which, ſo far as it went, had all the marks of authenticity. Thus connected, the fact bore an aſpect ſo like that of truth, as muſt have rendered the omiſſions, in ſpite of all my ſuſpicions to the contrary, ſtill inexcuſable.

The author of the life of Garrick, who has been intimately acquainted with Johnſon for many years, from whom Johnſon could not conceal a ſecret of his heart, or an incident in his ſtory, mentions the beginning of the year 1735, as the time when Johnſon undertook the inſtruction of young gentlemen in the Belles Letters at Litchfield. Garrick and Hawkeſworth

were of the party who became his pupils on this occaſion, and who profited during the ſhort time he acted in that ſtation. It is not certain, nor indeed material to know in what this ſcheme proved defective. But in May, 1736, we find him advertiſing a boarding-ſchool at Edial, near Litchfield.

This is a critical period in the life of Johnſon. His father could afford him no pecuniary aſſiſtance, and he had too much ſenſibility and manlineſs to continue a burthen on his friends. Such an eſtabliſhment could not however be accompliſhed without money; and the gleanings of a very few years in the ſituation occupied by Johnſon, allowing him to be a rigid œconomiſt, which he never was, muſt have been trifling. Thus circumſtanced, how then

could

could he raiſe a ſum adequate to the demand? The difficulty will be ſolved by ſuppoſing his marriage to have taken place about this time. Mrs. Porter, whom he married, had been left a widow; her huſband died inſolvent, but her ſettlement was ſecured. Though ſhe had three children, ſhe was ſtill young and handſome. The firſt advances probably proceeded from her, as her attachment to Johnſon was in oppoſition to the advice and deſire of all her relations. Her brother in particular offered to ſettle a very handſome annuity on her for life, provided ſhe would break her engagements. But nothing would diſſuade her. She brought her ſecond huſband about ſeven or eight hundred pounds, a great part of which was expended in fitting

up

up a houſe for a boarding-ſchool, which they had doubtleſs concerted between them. But this abortive ſcheme was likewiſe of ſhort duration. He has left no documents by which to account for the failure. His manners however ſufferable among the petty circle to whom his real merits excuſed every thing, were far from connecting popularity with his perſonal intercourſe. Parents could not be very fond of putting their children under the care of a man whoſe ſize was gigantic, whoſe temper was arrogant and auſtere, and whoſe habits were all clumſy and rude. His mind was as deſtitute of accommodation as his exterior was of politeneſs or grace; and to thoſe who eſtimate genius or worth only by a ſoft tongue, a ſmooth face, or ceremonious

carriage

carriage, his wit would appear insolence, his honesty folly, and his learning pedantry. Such a man was more likely to create aversion, than conciliate friendship, and instead of gathering a school, to be considered by the young and ignorant as a scarecrow. He had too much good sense to overlook so material an inconvenience. It might even strike him as an insuperable obstacle to success, and have its effect in determining him to abandon the whole plan, as romantic or impracticable.

He then adopted the sudden resolution of trying his fortune with the Booksellers in town. This adventure was not perhaps so much the consequence of disappointed expectations, as of his strong propensity for literary pursuits. Mr. Garrick, though his

his pupil, and inferior both in years and education, was no doubt conſulted on this event. The letter which introduced Johnſon to a clergyman of great reputation at that time as well as Garrick, however frequently quoted by thoſe who have gone before me on the ſame ſubject, cannot with propriety be omitted in this place.

To the Rev. Mr. COLSON.

Litchfield, March 2, 1736.

DEAR SIR,

I had the favour of yours, and am extremely obliged to you; but cannot ſay I have a greater affection for you upon it than

than I had before, being ſo long ſince ſo much endeared to you, as well by an early friendſhip as by your many excellent and valuable qualifications. And had I a ſon of my own, it would be my ambition, inſtead of ſending him to the univerſity, to diſpoſe of him as this young gentleman is. He and another neighbour of mine, one Mr. Samuel Johnſon, ſet out this morning for London together; David Garrick to be with you early next week, and Mr. Johnſon to try his fate with a Tragedy, and to ſee to get himſelf employed in ſome tranſlation either from the Latin or from the French. Johnſon is a very good ſcholar, and a poet, and I have great hopes he will turn out a fine tragedy-writer. If it ſhould

any

any ways lie in your way, I doubt not you will be ready to recommend and aſſiſt your countryman.

I am, &c.

GILB. WALMSLEY.

London diſcloſes an endleſs variety of reſources for independent merit. Here capacity and induſtry can never want encouragement. And when every other expedient has failed, there are ſtill hopes of doing ſomething in a market, where all ſorts of commodities are ſure to bring their price.

Johnſon had not lived to the age of ſix-and-twenty, without occaſionally exerciſing his talents and acquirements in compoſition.

ſition. Walmſley mentions him both as a poet and a ſcholar, without ſaying how he knew the fact. But few have the art of writing well who are not fond of ſhewing it, and Johnſon does not ſeem to poſſeſs leſs vanity than other men.

What reception this friendly introduction procured for him with Mr. Colſon, or whether this worthy clergyman was of any real ſervice to him, we are not told. Such manuſcripts as he brought to town were now by his direction probably offered to ſale. But it does not appear that his *London*, with all its merit, was treated with much reſpect. This literary market was then, as it generally has been, governed only by principles of knavery, envy, or caprice. Moſt publiſhers were the

tools

tools of ſome favorite author, in whoſe opinion they confided, and whom they careſſed on purpoſe that they might at once monopolize his labours and advice. Pride has been always the foible of the profeſſion. What juſtice could a ſtranger expect from an order of men who can never be generous, and ſeldom civil to one another.

The fact is, Johnſon's poem was likely to be on his hand, merely becauſe rejected by ſome capital Bookſellers. He had been ſtrongly importuned by his godfather Dr. Swynfen, before he left Litchfield, to publiſh it in the country, with a dedication to Dr. Chandler, who was then Biſhop of Litchfield and Coventry. But he was determined to ſolicit no connection with

the

the great. The church had been the primary object of his education, but from principles of religious delicacy he had uniformly declined the honour thus intended for him by his friends. And this was one conſideration which probably weighed againſt the advice of his godfather in the preſent caſe. But the ſhyneſs of the trade to bring forward this favourite production ſufficiently puniſhed his obſtinacy; and finding he could not live on poetry, which nobody would purchaſe, he connected himſelf with the editors of newſpapers, and often depended on the lucubrations of the day for the proviſions of to-morrow.

It was in this fugitive and dilitory ſituation that he got acquainted with Cave, the

printer, whoſe numerous literary projects afforded bread to multitudes.

This enterpriſing printer Johnſon compliments in the following copy of beautiful Latin verſes, to which an elegant Engliſh verſion is ſubjoined, which was done for me on purpoſe by a friend.

Ad URBANUM.

URBANE, nullis feſſe laboribus,
URBANE, nullis victe calumniis,
Cui fronte ſertum in erudita
Perpetuo viret et virebit.

Quid moliatur gens imitantium,
Quid et minetur, ſollicitus parum,
Vacare ſolis perge Muſis,
Juxta animo ſtudiiſq; felix.

Linguæ

Linguæ procacis plumbea ſpicula,
Fidens, ſuperbo frange ſilentio;
Victrix per obſtantes catervas
Sedulitas animoſa tendet.

Intende nervos fortis, inanibus
Riſurus olim niſibus æmuli;
Intende jam nervos, habebis
Participes operæ Camœnas.

Non ulla Muſis pagina gratior,
Quam quæ ſeveris ludicra jungere
Novit, fatigatamq; nugis
Utilibus recreare mentem.

Texente Nymphis ſerta Lycoride,
Roſæ ruborem ſic Viola adjuvat
Immiſta, ſic Iris refulget
Æthereis variata ſucis.

To URBAN.

URBAN, whom labour cannot bow,
Nor calumny ſubdue;
The wreath that decks thy learned brow,
Shall bloom for ever new.

Whate'er thy mimicks may deſign,
Howe'er thy name revile;
Brave man, to court the Muſe be thine,
On thee the Muſe ſhall ſmile.

By ſcornful ſilence break the dart,
The tongue envenom'd throws;
Thy diligence and dauntleſs heart
Shall force thro' all thy foes.

Proceed, and thou ſhalt live to ſee
Thy rival proſtrate laid;
Proceed, and all the Nine to thee
Shall lend their envied aid.

What page to them more pleaſure brings?
What page like thine refin'd?
Where mirth, ſucceeding ſerious things,
Relieves the weary mind.

So violets with roſes twine,
And livelier bluſhes riſe:
So various colours blended ſhine,
When Iris paints the ſkies.

How this connection commenced, the minute tranſactions it produced, or how long it continued is yet aſcertained by no documents before the public.

Johnſon ſeems to have contributed his ſhare from the beginning in the Gentleman's Magazine. But in ſuch enequal and fugitive compilations, no man is fond of writing any thing otherwiſe than anonymouſly. In the year 1738 a few petit pieces however appeared with the initials

of his name, which perhaps have been excelled by nothing he has ſince produced. When theſe are excepted it will not be very eaſy amidſt the huge maſs of materials contained in a magazine, to diſcriminate even the pen of a Johnſon. Of this particular he was himſelf always ſingularly ſhy. He declined pointing out any of his earlier performances, when ſome of his moſt intimate friends aſked it as a favour. To others he acknowledged that he then wrote many things which merited no diſtinction from the traſh with which they were conſigned to oblivion. And whatever the Bookſellers may alledge, it is a fact very well known, that a perfect catalogue of his works was a taſk to which he has always ſaid his own recollection was inadequate.

Great

Great merit has been aſcribed to Johnſon for the ſpeeches he fabricated for the *Senate of Lilliput*. It was by this diſreſpectful appellation that he marked his contempt for the Britiſh Houſe of Commons. This ſeries of chimerical debates commenced in the year 1740, and were continued for ſeveral ſeſſions. He received hints from a perſon who attended the Houſe regularly for that purpoſe. The public, who were anxious to know what their delegates were doing, gratefully accepted of Johnſon's account as there was not another, and allowed that to be genuine which they had not the means of perceiving an impoſture.

Men however who know what it is to report the ſpeeches in parliament, will be

ſtruck with nothing mighty extraordinary in all this. It is well known Mr. Woodfall, and Mr. Sheridan, who is certainly next in fame as a Reporter, have ſometimes exceeded within the four-and-twenty hours, Johnſon's labours for a month. There is a prodigious difference between a man's compaſſing at his leiſure in his ſtudy, ſurrounded with every domeſtic convenience, and feeling no preſſure from the urgent demands of the preſs, and where he is inceſſantly moleſted by the buſtle of thoſe at work, and by a thouſand circumſtances which, though not eaſily deſcribed, are yet peculiarly inimical to recollection.

This is their ſituation to whom the public are indebted for ſuch accounts of the parliamentary proceedings as are daily detailed in Newſpapers. Theſe gentlemen, after

after ſitting for twelve, or ſometimes eighteen hours on a ſtretch, crouded as cloſely as they can be, without victuals, perchance, or drink, haſten as faſt to their reſpective offices as poſſible, where they often write ſix, ſeven, or eight hours, at the rate of a column an hour. This incredible diſpatch, to which the period of diurnal publications indiſpenſibly ſubjects them, abſolutely precludes all reviſal, either of their own copy, or any proofs from the preſs. The wonder is not, therefore, that there ſhould be ſo many improprieties in ſtyle and arrangement, but that there are, in fact, ſo few.

It is habit only which can unite with ſuch facility any degree of correctneſs whatever. The mechaniſm of the buſineſs

is an art, which practice alone can give. It combines accuracy and readineſs of recollection, command of language, ſound health, and great rapidity in the liberal uſe of the pen. In the two former Johnſon had undoubtedly few equals, in the two latter he ſeems materially deficient. Seldom, altogether, free from illneſs, his conſtitution could not have ſupported the drudgery of attendance. And the form of his alphabet, which inclines ſtrongly to the left, inſtead of the right, is a proof that he was not much maſter of what may be called an expeditious hand.

His predeceſſor in this Herculean labour was Guthrie, who, long before he died, was reduced to the neceſſity of uſing an amanuenſis. Johnſon was every way ſuperior,

perior, and it is aſſerted by thoſe who ought to know, that the magazine, during his connection with it, roſe conſiderably in the public eſtimation. Hawkeſworth, his friend and imitator, ſucceeded him likewiſe in theſe curſory productions, and brought with him no inconſiderable ſhare of his maſter's genius.

While thus employed in the compoſition of ſpeeches, which never were ſpoken, his admirers imagined they perceived a ſtriking appoſition, in his ſtile and train of thinking, to the various ſpeakers. This characteriſtic was, however, the more impoſſible, that Johnſon never, in the whole courſe of his life, attended one debate in either houſe of parliament. This was a ſpecies of ingenuity, which no inſtruction could

could ſupply. And nothing expoſes the mean adulation of his eulogiſts more, than the abſurdity of thus praiſing him for what was, in its own nature, impracticable.

The *Life of Savage*, it is ſaid, was undertaken and executed with peculiar expedition, in order to convince the proprietor of the Gentleman's Magazine, that Johnſon was equal to this laborious employ. And he has often enough aſſerted, with ſome degree of oſtentation, that he completed this long and well-written life, in little more than ſix-and-thirty hours.

In 1738 he began a tranſlation of the famous Father Paul's hiſtory of the Council of Trent. It is not known on what account this work was laid aſide. Though no great progreſs was ever made in it, a few ſheets

ſheets of it were certainly printed. Theſe, it is to be hoped, will be carefully preſerved by ſome friend to letters; and the public will be highly indebted to the editor, who ſhall be the firſt to preſent it with ſuch an acceptable curioſity.

What Johnſon ſays, in his introduction to the Life of Dryden, is ſo literally true in his own caſe, that we may as well make him ſpeak for himſelf. "In ſettling the or-" der of his works there is ſome difficulty; " the time of writing and publiſhing is not " always the ſame; nor can the firſt edi-" tions be eaſily found, if even from them " could be obtained the neceſſary informa-" tion." The truth is, that during his engagement with Cave, he publiſhed ſeveral lives, and other detached perform-

ances,

ances, many of which were collected by his friend, Mr. Davies, and given to the world, a few years ago, under the title of Fugitive Pieces.

Among the earlieſt of theſe appeared, *London, a Poem, in Imitation of the third Satire of Juvenal.* This elegant and maſterly production, in which the enormities of the metropolis, and the infinite perils to which health, reputation, and virtue, are inevitably expoſed by a London life, as well without fortune as with it, could, notwithſtanding, hardly find a purchaſer in the whole trade. The celebrated Mr. Robert Dodſley, however, was an exception. He ſaw the ſatire was aimed with the dexterity of no common poet. Johnſon aſked only ten guineas, and Dodſley gave

gave it, rather as an encouragement to go on, than from any ſanguine expectation of ſucceſs in the ſale of an *Imitation*. Johnſon is reported to have boaſted among his friends, *that Dodſley was the firſt bookſeller who found out that he had any genius*. We are told that Mr. Pope read the poem with pleaſure, who, receiving no ſatisfactory anſwer to repeated enquiries after the author, ſaid, "It cannot be long before my curio-"ſity will be gratified, the writer of this "poem will ſoon be *detérré*.

Such an opinion, from Pope, was one of the higheſt compliments which could be made to a young author. Whether it produced any perſonal friendſhip, acquaintance, or interview, is not certain; but the rigidneſs which runs through his criticiſm,

on

on moſt of Pope's works, gives ſome ground of ſuſpicion, that a very early diſlike had been conceived againſt the poet, his verſes, or his commentator.

What he has written concerning the imitations of this great man, is not inapplicable to his own. "The imitations of "Horace," ſays he, "ſeem to have been "written as relaxations of his genius. "This employment became his favourite "by its facility: the plan was ready to "his hand, and nothing was required but "to accommodate as he could, the ſenti-"ments of an old author, to recent facts, "or familiar images; but what is eaſy is "ſeldom excellent: ſuch imitations cannot "give pleaſure to common readers; the "man of learning may ſometimes be ſur-

prized

"prized and delighted by an unexpected "parallel; but the compariſon requires "knowledge of the original, which will "likewiſe often detect ſtrained applica- "tions. Between Roman images and "Engliſh manners, there will be an irre- "concileable diſſimilitude, and the work "will be generally uncouth and party-co- "loured; neither original nor tranſlated, "neither ancient nor modern."

Theſe were his ſentiments, when his judgment was matured by experience, and after a long ſeries of ſtudies, in which many opportunities muſt have occurred, of a cool and critical diſcuſſion of the ſubject. This may probably account for his writing ſo little in that way afterwards; for, notwithſtanding the very high merit

of *London*, as a ſpecies of imitation, in no part of his works, perhaps, does he appear more ſuſceptible of criticiſm, as the few following brief ſtrictures, communicated to me by a warm admirer of Pope, will ſufficiently evince. He owned, at the ſame time, that nothing but Johnſon's nibbling, with ſo much indelicacy, at the beautiful verſifications of a poet, whom he had always eſteemed the moſt claſſical and elegant in the language, could have provoked him to read, what he acknowledged an excellent poem, with ſuch faſtidious minuteneſs.

Let

Let obſervation, with extenſive view,
Survey the . . . from China to Peru.

Johnſon's Imitation.

Let obſervation ſurvey the world, from China to Peru, and we muſt allow its *view to be extenſive*, whether the poet tell us ſo or not.

Who now reſolves, from vice and London far,
To breathe in diſtant fields a purer air.

Johnſon's Imitation.

If he was *far* from London, certainly the fields which he breathed in muſt be *diſtant*.

With ſlaviſh tenets taint our poiſon'd youth.

Johnſon's Imitation.

To taint poiſon'd youth, is to poiſon them twice.

Spurn'd as a begger, dreaded as a ſpy,
Live unregarded, unlamented die.

Johnſon's Imitation.

Johnſon cenſures Pope's epitaph on himſelf, which begins,

Under this ſtone, or under this fill,
Or under this turf, &c.

" When a man," ſays he, " is buried, " the queſtion under what he is buried, is " eaſily decided. He forgot that though " he wrote the epitaph in a ſtate of uncer- " tainty, yet it could not be laid over him " till his grave was made. Such is the " folly of wit, when it is ill employed."

Johnſon did not die till a conſiderable number of years had elapſed, though he ſays he was dying at the time he wrote the above line; he died too exceedingly lamented. He made a miſtake on a very ſerious

ſerious occaſion, as well as the poet whom he cenſures.

Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,
Than when a blockhead's inſult points the dart.

Juvenal ſays no ſuch thing; it is his ſenſe, tortured to little leſs than nonſenſe. What! does a blockead's inſult give the deepeſt wound? Every old woman can tell us that "a fool's bolt is ſoon ſhot." No one minds it, but thoſe who are themſelves not over wiſe.

Thy ſatire point, and animate thy page.

Johnſon's Imitation.

Here Johnſon is again unlucky in the concluding line of a poem. By pointing the ſatire, he muſt animate the page of courſe. Addiſon fell into this fault of tau-

tology, as often as Johnſon, but Addiſon was not ſo ſevere as Johnſon, in criticiſing others.

This poem, very probably, gives an exact picture of *London*, as it appeared to his mind immediately on his leaving the country, while every rural convenience was yet recollected with regret, and thoſe of the town had been enjoyed only to ſuch a degree, in ſuch company, or under ſuch circumſtances, as might rather diſguſt than gratify. The difficulty of ſecuring a proſpect of employment, before he could be known, the ſhyneſs of the bookſellers, to intereſt themſelves in the fortune or buſineſs of a ſtranger, the wants of futurity, which could hope but little aſſiſtance from

the

the preſent, which was unequal to its own ſupply, ill health, few friends, exquiſite ſenſibility, and a temper of mind, rather melancholy than chearful, obviouſly account for the indignant ſpirit, and ſtrong aſſemblage of melancholy imagery with which that performance abounds.

Under theſe impreſſions he undoubtedly meditated a return to a country ſituation. The buſtle of the town ſeems to have offended his predilection for retirement, and the occupation of an author, his unconquerable love of eaſe. Perhaps, Mrs. Johnſon might alſo be conſulted on the like occaſion, and it is likely, would rather wiſh to enjoy her old friends, than have the trouble, in ſo precarious a place as London, to cultivate new ones. It is certain

he had ſolicitations to accept of a ſchool in the neighbourhood of Litchfield, with which he had no other objection to comply but a want of the neceſſary qualifications.

The following letter ought to have been inſerted before, but from the obſervations juſt made it will not be miſplaced here, eſpecially as it requires more labour than I can beſtow, as well as materials, which have not yet been found, to ſettle the chronology of his publications and tranſactions, with certainty or preciſion.

SIR,

" Mr. Samuel Johnſon (author of London a Satire, and ſome other poetical pieces) is a native of this country, and

much

much reſpected by ſome worthy gentlemen in his neighbourhood, who are truſtees of a charity-ſchool now vacant, the certain ſalary of which is ſixty pounds per annum, of which they are deſirous to make him maſter; but unfortunately he is not capable of receiving their bounty, which would make him happy for life, by not being a Maſter of Arts, which, by the ſtatutes of this ſchool, the maſter of it muſt be. Now theſe gentlemen do me the honour to think, that I have intereſt enough in you, to prevail upon you to write to Dean Swift, to perſuade the Univerſity of Dublin to ſend a diploma to me, conſtituting this poor man Maſter of Arts in their Univerſity. They highly extol the man's learning and probity; and will not

be

be perſuaded that the Univerſity will make any difficulty of conferring ſuch a favour upon a ſtranger, if he is recommended by the Dean. They ſay he is not afraid of the ſtricteſt examination, though he is of ſo long a journey; and will venture it, if the Dean thinks it neceſſary, chooſing rather to die upon the road, than be ſtarved to death in ——— tranſlating for book-ſellers, which has been his only ſubſiſtence for ſome time paſt. I fear there is more difficulty in this affair than theſe good-natured gentlemen apprehend, eſpecially as their election cannot be delayed longer than the 11th of next month. If you ſee the matter in the ſame light as it appears to me, I hope you will burn this, and pardon me for giving you ſo much trouble about

about an impracticable thing; but if you think there is a probability of obtaining the favour aſked, I am ſure your humanity and propenſity to relieve merit in diſtreſs, will incline you to ſerve the poor man, without my adding any more to the trouble I have already given you, than aſſuring you that I am, with great truth,

SIR,

Your moſt humble Servant,

GOWER.

Trentham, Aug. 1, 1738.

It is rather odd this letter did not procure a more favourable anſwer, and that Johnſon did not ſucceed to the ſchool. We know not whether Swift, to whoſe friend

friend it was addreſſed, knew any thing of the matter, but it is obvious Johnſon has written the life of this very extraordinary genius, as if his mind had been ſomewhat warped, and he owed the Dean no returns of kindneſs or gratitude. Whatever the impediment might have been, it ultimately proved inſuperable. Johnſon, whoſe ſanguine imagination was eaſily influenced, and all whoſe hopes, by whatever means exerted, ſtill glowed with inceſſant fervour, felt long and ſeverely the diſappointment.

It ſeems to be about this time that he planned and executed the poem, which he calls the *Vanity of Human Wiſhes*, another imitation of his favourite Juvenal*. This however

* Tenth Satire.

however was not brought forward till ſome time in the year 1759. His ſituation in the Gentleman's Magazine was even then continued, and is the true reaſon why Cave became the publiſher. The train of thinking is in all reſpects worthy the author. It is a poem which every where diſcovers the ſame beauties, and not a few of the ſame faults, which in the former offend every reader of genuine taſte and correctneſs.

The lines with which we venture to compare a few of Johnſon's, are quoted from a New Tranſlation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal, by Thomas Morris, Eſq. late Captain of his Majeſty's ſeventeenth Regiment of Foot, publiſhed as a ſpecimen of a complete verſion of that maſterly writer.

writer*. And when the defects of what goes by the name of Dryden, the ſimilarity between Roman and Britiſh vices, and the ſingular gravity, truth and boldneſs of Juvenal, are duly conſidered, who would not wiſh his propoſals may ſucceed. Theſe quotations are chiefly ſelected for exhibiting to the Engliſh reader, the beauty and defects of Johnſon's Imitation, as they who comprehend not the meaning of the ancient poet, are not competent to judge with propriety on his application to modern times.

This communication I likewiſe owe to the ſame gentleman, whoſe pertinent ſtrictures on London have already been inſerted.

" Yet

* Subſcriptions are taken in by Mr. Murray, in Fleet-Street.

" Yet ſtill one gen'ral cry the ſky aſſails,
" And gain and grandeur load the tainted gales;
" Few know the toiling ſtateſman's fear or care,
" Th' inſidious rival and the gaping heir.

Johnſon's Imitation.

The ſupplication in each temple heard,
By ev'ry mortal to the gods preferr'd,
Is, to be grac'd with pow'r, with riches bleſt,
And in the forum keep the largeſt cheſt:
Let us remember, ere we make our pray'r,
No aconite is ſerv'd in earthen ware;
That apprehend, when cups with jewels ſhine,
And the broad gold inflames the Setine wine.

Tranſlation of the Tenth Satire of Juvenal.

Juvenal ſpeaks out; but Johnſon hints *too obliquely* at the practice of poiſoning: a perſon unacquainted with the original, will not underſtand his meaning.

Load the tainted gales,

is not much better than

Load the *loaden* gales,
Or, *taint* the *tainted* gales.

Johnſon,

Johnſon, ſpeaking of Pope's epitaph ſays,

Op'ning virtues blooming round

is ſomething like tautology. I think *load the tainted gales* is more like it.

" Or ſeen a new-made mayor's unweildy ſtate.

Surely Johnſon might have made ſomething out of the Lord Mayor's ſhew, anſwering to Juvenal's deſcription of the prætor's going to proclaim the ſhews of the circus. In Juvenal's time the prætor of Rome was not a greater perſonage than our Lord Mayor, and the figure made by the one now, is full as ridiculous as that made by the other long ago.

" For

" For why did Wolſey, near the ſteeps of fate,
" On weak foundations raiſe th'enormous weight?
" Why but to ſink beneath misfortune's blow,
" With louder ruin to the gulphs below.

Johnſon's Imitation.

Sejanus little thought what he deſired,
When to the higheſt rank his ſoul aſpir'd;
The vaſt increaſe of riches pomp, and pow'r,
Was only adding ſtories to his tow'r,
The more aſtoniſhing to make it's fall,
That buried riches, honours, lord and all.

Tranſlation, &c.

That the blow of misfortune might throw down Wolſey is plain enough; that it could demoliſh a building is not ſo obvious.

Let art and genius weep.

Johnſon's Imitation.

Johnſon, ſpeaking of Pope's epitaph, ſays, " in another couplet art is uſed for " arts, that a rhyme may be had to heart." Has he not fallen himſelf into the like miſtake, without having the ſame excuſe for it.

" Enquirer ceaſe; petitions yet remain,
" Which heav'n may hear, nor deem religion vain.

Johnſon's Imitation.

The ſenſe here is ſtrangely broken, and rendered obſcure.

" Yet when the ſenſe of ſacred preſence fires,
" And ſtrong devotion to the ſkies aſpires.

Johnſon's Imitation.

Is not this anti-climax? Would it not be better thus?

Yet

Yet when devotion to the skies aspires,
And the strong sense of sacred presence fires.

"These goods for man the laws of heav'n ordain.
"These goods he grants, who grants the power to
"gain."

Johnson's Imitatio

If Johnson thought Pope blameable for not using the singular *art* instead of the plural arts, for the sake of rhyme; how much more to be condemned is the critic himself, who uses the plural *goods*, instead of the singular *good*, without any reason that I can find, and in open defiance of his own decree? I appeal to his dictionary. Under the word *goods* we find, 1. Moveables in a house. 2. Wares, freight, mer-

chandize: Under the word *good*, 4. Moral qualities.

And makes that happineſs ſhe does not find.

Johnſon's Imitation.

The expletive *does* in the laſt line of the poem, and in the moſt important place in that line, makes a moſt lame and impotent concluſion.

"How wouldſt thou ſhake at Britain's modiſh tribe,
"Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe?

The latter line is loaden with uſeleſs epithets, and the ſenſe weakened by them. How much better thus!

How wouldſt thou ſhake at Britain's modiſh tribe!
How wouldſt thou dart the taunt, and edge the gibe!

Till conqueſt unreſiſted ceas'd to pleaſe,
And rights ſubmitted left him none to ſeize.

The whole account of Wolſey is in the preſent tenſe. Why the author choſe ſo ungracefully to change the tenſe in this couplet only, which is in the middle of the account too, I cannot gueſs: it has a ſlovenly appearance however; and how eaſily might it have been avoided, thus:

Till conqueſts unreſiſted ceaſe to pleaſe,
And rights ſubmitted leave him none to ſeize.

Till captive ſcience yields her laſt retreat.

Johnſon's Imitation.

The epithet *captive* is not only uſeleſs, but nonſenſical; for, if ſcience was taken captive, what retreat could ſhe be in poſſeſſion of? We muſt hope that the author

meant to ſay, that " when ſcience yields " her laſt retreat, ſhe becomes a captive :" This, however, is a piece of intelligence ſcarcely worth relating.

Should no diſeaſe thy torpid veins invade.

Johnſon's Imitation.

That is, in plain Engliſh, ſhould no diſeaſe invade thy diſeaſed veins. In ſhort it is a pleonaſm, to make up the meaſure; but not quite ſo bad a one as the former.

He views and wonders that they pleaſe no more

Johnſon's Imitation.

A trifling change would make this line better.

He views and wonders they ſhould pleaſe no more.

No

No ſounds, alas! would touch th'impervious ear.

Johnſon's Imitation.

If *no* ſounds *would* touch it, *it* certainly *muſt* be impervious.

Johnſon fortunately for his reputation was ſoon ſatisfied his *forte* did not lie in making verſes. His poetry, though not any where loaded with epithets, is deſtitute of animation. The ſtrong ſenſe, the biting ſarcaſm, the deep ſolemnity, which mark his genius, no where aſſume that union, ſymmetry, or collected energy, which is neceſſary to produce a general effect. We are now and then ſtruck with a fine thought, a fine line, or a fine paſſage, but little intereſted by the whole. His mode of

verſifying, which is an imitation of Pope, may bear analization, but after reading his beſt pieces once, few are deſirous of reading them again.

The life of Savage, which was his firſt biographical eſſay, had ſuch a reception with the public, or anſwered the book-ſeller's purpoſe ſo well, that Johnſon was encouraged to cultivate this ſpecies of compoſition. For a ſeries of years therefore he was conſtantly enriching the annals of literature, with new articles of Engliſh biography. It is impoſſible to be exact in ſtating the dates of theſe public actions, or giving the hiſtory of their origin and compoſition. The particulars they involve are the leſs intereſting, that they ſeem to have grown into requeſt only ſince the

fame

fame of the author has been eſtabliſhed; that they are diſtinguiſhed by no other ſpecies of excellence than fidelity and perſpicuity, and they might ſtill have continued unadmired, and even unknown, but for the ſuperior luſtre of ſubſequent performances.

Oſborne ſhared the honour with Cave and Dodſley, of being one of Johnſon's firſt patrons. An affray with that curious bookſeller, gave the trade no very advantageous idea of Johnſon's temper. It was huſhed at the time, in complaiſance to the opulence of the one, but gradually became a ſubject of ſpeculation, as the reputation of the other increaſed. Johnſon was employed in writ-

ing

ing an introduction to the Harleian library, which, as it gave an account of various articles, could not be done in haſte. Oſborne inceſſantly urged expedition, and had often recourſe to contumelious language. Johnſon who had much pride, had alſo much good-nature, made no other reply to this tireſome impertinence, but that he was as buſy as poſſible. The calculations of bookſellers are ſolely confined to the ſale, and ſeldom involve the various avocations and deliberations which protract compoſition. The delicate embaraſſments of genius are conſequently not unfrequently treated with rudeneſs and vulgarity. No body of men are more uniform and eager in taking advantage of their neceſſities, who, like

Johnſon,

Johnſon, are reduced to a dependance on their favour. Oſborne was baſe enough to make Johnſon feel his ſituation, by a brutal ſarcaſm, which he blurted in his face, on finding him reading with great coolneſs, while the quantum of copy promiſed by this time, was not yet begun. Johnſon, ſurpriſed into a paſſion, by the bookſeller's rage and ferocity, ſtarted from his ſeat, without uttering a word, and, with the book in his hand, inſtantly knocked him down.

Hitherto he had tried his genius as a tranſlator, a ſatyriſt, and a biographer; he was now to appear a philologiſt. The plan of his Dictionary, which he diſplays with ſo much elegance and dignity in an addreſs to the late Earl of Cheſterfield, was publiſhed

liſhed ſo early as the year 1748. This performance promiſed ſomething ſo much like what all men of taſte had long thought wanting to the purity, ſtability, and perfection of our language, exhibited an object of ſuch magnitude to the public mind, and was itſelf ſo exquiſite a ſpecimen of the happieſt arrangement and moſt poliſhed diction, that it brought Johnſon forward to general attention with peculiar advantage. The eyes of all the world were turned on what part the nobleman thus diſtinguiſhed would now act in concert with the firſt writer, and intereſted by the ſketch of a work the moſt laborious and uſeful of any which even then had rouſed the curioſity and excited the wonder of an enlightened age. From a

ſecretary

ſecretary of ſtate, ſtill more illuſtrious for his elegant accompliſhments than for his high birth or official ſituation ſomething like ſubſtantial encouragement was expected to an undertaking which aimed at no leſs than a *ſtandard Dictionary of the Engliſh tongue*. His lordſhip was a competent judge of the ſubject. He acknowledged its importance and neceſſity. He occupied a ſphere in life, an influence among the great, and a character among the learned, which enabled him to do much. His vanity was not inferior to his power; and had the talents of Johnſon ſtooped to the proſtituted language of adulation, his toil had probably been conſiderably alleviated by the taſte, the addreſs, the aſſiduity and the countenance of Cheſterfield. But nothing

thing can be conceived more diametrically oppoſite and irreconcileable than the tempers, the prejudices, the habits, the purſuits, and the peculiarities of theſe contemporary wits. A ſemblance of intimacy took place, in which it is not likely that either were ſincere. The oddities of the author furniſhed the peer with a fund of ridicule, and the faſtidious elegance of the peer excited only the averſion, contempt, and pity of the author. *All the celebrated qualities of Cheſterfield*, ſaid (Johnſon to an intimate friend, to whom he was then in the habit of unboſoming himſelf on occaſion) *are like certain ſpecies of fruit which is pleaſant enough to the eye, but there is no taſting it without danger.*

In

In this well written pamphlet it was his ambition to rival the preface to Chambers's Dictionary. How far he ſucceeded is not eaſily determined. It will not be denied, that he poſſeſſes more energy of language, and perhaps a more beautiful arrangement of the multifarious particulars to which he ſolicits the public attention, but he certainly wants the ſimplicity, and indeed is proſcribed by his ſubject from diſplaying the knowledge, of Chambers.

Cheſterfield joined in the general applauſe which followed the exhibition of a deſign thus replete with utility in the aim, and originality in the execution. He was proud to have attracted the regards of ſuch a man as Johnſon, and flattered himſelf with the hopes of freſh acceſſion of

fame

fame, from being the patron of ſuch a work. But the manners of the operator were ſo diſguſting to this Mæcenas of letters, and learned men, that the only concern he took in the matter was ſaying a few polite things at his table, and congratulating the lovers of grammar on the improvment which that ſcience would derive from the labours of Johnſon. It is a diſgrace to his memory, and to the age, that the author of an undertaking ſo arduous and extenſive was not placed beyond the recurrence of neceſſity, and that while his genius was conferring permanancy on their language, the exigencies of his ſituation impelled him to apply to other means for daily ſubſiſtence.

The

The talents requiſite for ſuch an undertaking ſeldom meet in one man. Its magnitude was enough to ſtagger any reſolution leſs vigorous, to repreſs any ardour leſs manly, to derange any intellect leſs collected than that of Johnſon. But his capacity was competent to the object. His reading was chiefly philological, his taſte was improved by an intimate acquaintance with all the claſſical remains of antiquity, his memory retained with exactneſs whatever his judgment had matured; and he poſſeſſed a penetration or diſcernment characteriſtically ſolid, cool, and diſcriminating. It was not a compoſition that depended on the paroxyſms of genius, a vigorous imagination, fertility of invention, originality of conception, or brilliancy of

ſtyle. Patient induſtry, laborious attention, a determination of forgetting the laſſitude of fatigue by a renewal of the taſk; and a mind, which notwithſtanding a thouſand avocations and obſtacles, like the water in a river, ſtill returned to the ſame channel, and purſued the ſame courſe; were ſome of the qualifications with which Johnſon formed the plan, and entered on the compilation of his Dictionary.

A work thus complicated and prodigious admits great variety in collecting the materials, and frequent relaxations from the exertions it demands. Many are the ſubjects which would preſent themſelves to the author's mind, from ſuch an aſſociation of ideas as muſt have accompanied the progreſs of his ſtudies. And it may be rationally

rationally conjectured, that he often found relief not only in the ſociety of his ſelect friends, but in a great variety of literary purſuits, the more pleaſing probably for the time, that they might appear to others of leſs importance.

His *Irene* however, which was brought upon the ſtage in 1749, is generally acknowledged to have been written before he came to town. Why it did not make its appearance ſooner, and why it was not better received when it did, are queſtions which now perhaps cannot be anſwered.

It would be a ſingular period in the annals of the Engliſh Theatre, in which the reception of authors were regulated by their merit. Johnſon's temper was

ill calculated for ſupplicating favours from inferiors. It was not in his heart or his nature, to hang about a manager, to aſſociate with the critics in the green-room, to cultivate an intimacy with ſpouters, or to intereſt the patronage of loungers in the lobby of the playhouſe. He either did not undetſtand that private pliancy and public oſtentation which conſtitute the myſtery of the trade, or had the manlineſs to regard with contempt, every ſpecies of obliquity, even when it leads to ſucceſs. The plot however, the thoughts, and the diction of his tragedy, are allowed to be beautiful and maſterly. But he is ſparing of that buſtle and incident, which atone for the want of every excellence with a London audience. A performance which exemplified

exemplified the preſcriptions of an Ariſtotle, was not likely to pleaſe a nation tutored in this barbarous taſte. It does not abound in doggrel madrigals or epigrammatic rodomontade. It degrades, not ſcenes of dignified diſtreſs with the Pantomime of Harlequin, the goſſippings or gibberiſh of gypſies, or the ribaldry and buffoonery of clowns. It is written only to improve the heart, to elucidate and refine the paſſions, to connect the intereſts of humanity with the dictates of reaſon, and to reſtore the union of taſte and virtue.

But though the principal characters were given to thoſe who at that time excelled in the profeſſion, the expectation of Johnſon and his friends was

diſappointed. The firſt exhibition was coldly received, and the audience it ſeems were more diſpoſed to admire the author than to be affected by his ſcenes. A gentleman who ſat in the pit, on that occaſion, has told me, that on looking round him he ſaw nobody uſing their handkerchief; but the whiſper was ſtrong and prevalent, that the *poet was a prodigy of learning*.

Much, eſpecially in tragedy, depends on the actors. Johnſon's addreſs was diſguſting. He had not made any advances to conciliate their fondneſs, or to prompt their exertions. His manners were gruff and diſtant, his language was coarſe and oraculous; and though Garrick was of the party, poſterity who ſhall mourn *Irene*, will

will be rather apt to impute her fate to inanimate acting, than unskilful writing.

Johnson was not of a turn of mind to struggle for any thing not immediately within his reach. Under the auspices of a Garrick, whose assistance and advice he could always command, who can doubt but by a sedulous application he might have excelled in the higher species of the drama? But he who had it in his power to lead, was unwilling to continue acting only a secondary part. Other subjects less hazardous in the issue, and more easy in the execution, were incessantly occurring and engaging his cultivation, with which he ran no risk of a rival, and which, though perhaps

leſs profitable, yet yielded his neceſſities a readier ſupply.

His diſguſt and contempt for the public taſte ſuggeſted to him the firſt idea of furniſhing the town with a periodical paper twice a week. In ſuch a work he enjoyed the proſpect of expoſing the taſte of his countrymen, and often contributing by the happy application of ſuperior talents, to their correction and refinement. And perhaps it may be doing him no injuſtice to ſuppoſe, that wherever the faſhionable levities of taſte are cenſured, he glances obliquely at the uſage of *Irene*.

By an incident in the hiſtory of the *Rambler*, not generally known, that celebrated work was publiſhed at Edinburgh,

at

at the ſame time the publication of it went on in London.

Mr. Elphinſton, well known in the learned world for a variety of valuable publications, both in proſe and verſe, was the intimate friend of Johnſon, and then on a viſit to his relations in that part of the united kingdom. The firſt number came to him under cover, and without a name. But the author could not be concealed; and, in Mr. Elphinſton's opinion, there was not, in England, another than Johnſon, competent to ſuch an undertaking. He conſequently conceived the benevolent deſign of diffuſing the work among his countrymen, as promiſing much inſtruction to them, and ſome profit to the author. It was immediately reprinted in

Scotland

Scotland in a minute and elegant manner. Mr. Elphinſton not only ſuperintended the preſs, and took every poſſible care of the edition, but likewiſe enriched it by a new and appoſite tranſlation of the mottos. Moſt of theſe were retained in the next edition which appeared in London, and Johnſon, in a note appended to a collection of them, acknowledges the obligation in the handſomeſt terms. Indeed this was an inſtance of attention and friendſhip, with which, as it well became him, he always expreſſed the moſt grateful ſatisfaction.

In the following letter we learn ſome particulars relating to this buſineſs. The original reception of the Rambler in Scotland is not obſcurely hinted, and the author's

thor's tenderneſs for his labours, ſtrongly marked by the ſolicitude with which he cheriſhes the partiality which his friend had conceived in their favour. The original, in Johnſon's own hand-writing, is ſtill in Mr. Elphinſton's poſſeſſion. The writer's regard for true learning and worth, is happily illuſtrated by his kind attention to the celebrated Ruddiman. The honourable teſtimony which he bears to the virtue of that venerable man, was a proof that his heart was always in uniſon with the wiſe and good, whoever they were, or wherever they lived.

DEAR SIR,

"I cannot but confeſs the failures of my "correſpondence, but hope the ſame re-

"gard

" gard which you expreſs for me on every
" other occaſion, will incline you to for give
" me. I am often, very often ill, and
" when I am well, am obliged to work:
" and indeed have never much uſed myſelf
" to punctuality. You are however not
" to make unkind inferences, when I
" forbear to reply to your kindneſs: for
" be aſſured, I never receive a letter from
" you without great pleaſure, and a very
" warm ſenſe of your generoſity and friend-
" ſhip, which I heartily blame myſelf for
" not cultivating with more care. In this,
" as in many other caſes, I go wrong in
" oppoſition to conviction: for I think
" ſcarce any temporal good equally to be
" deſired with the regard and familiarity
" of worthy men. I hope we ſhall be

" ſome

" ſometime nearer to each other, and have
" a more ready way of pouring out our
" hearts.

" I am glad that you ſtill find encou-
" ragement to proceed in your publication,
" and ſhall beg the favour of ſix more vo-
" lumes, to add to my former ſix, when
" you can, with any convenience, ſend
" them me. Pleaſe to preſent a ſet in my
" name to Mr. Ruddiman; of whom I
" hear, that his learning is not his higheſt
" excellence.

" I have tranſcribed the mottos and re-
" turned them, I hope not too late; of
" which I think many very happily per-
" formed. Mr. Cave has put the laſt in
" the Magazine, in which I think he did
" well. I beg of you to write ſoon, and

" to

" to write often, and to write long letters;
" which I hope in time to repay you, but
" you muſt be a patient creditor. I have
" however this of gratitude, that I think
" of you with regard, when I do not per-
" haps give the proofs which I ought of
" being

" SIR, your moſt obliged,

" and moſt humble ſervant,

" SAM. JOHNSON."

To Mr. Elphinſton. [*Without any date.*]

From this ſoothing and friendly letter, Johnſon ſeems to have been much flattered by the ſucceſs of his Rambler in North-Britain. Indeed he always acknowledged, that it was by far the beſt edition of the work.

work. It was, in fact, much more correct than the original one in London, though publiſhed under his own eye: for his friend ſpared no attention, which could by any means contribute to the author's reputation.

About this time Mr. Elphinſton loſt his mother, which affected him ſo deeply, that Johnſon thought it his duty to write to him on the occaſion: which, by the way, was a ſubject on which no writer, ancient or modern, ever excelled him. The letter breathes a ſpirit of the moſt elevated piety and of the tendereſt conſolation; and being handed about while the publication of the Rambler went on in Edinburgh, conſiderably promoted the circulation of it, eſpecially among religious readers. We may judge

judge of his ſincerity in that letter, by a peruſal of the papers in the Rambler of nearly the ſame date. He had heard the news from Mrs. Strahan, ſiſter to Mr. Elphinſton; and wrote in all probability his fifty-ſecond and fifty-fourth numbers under that impreſſion.

DEAR SIR,

" You have, as I find by every kind of " evidence, loſt an excellent mother; and " I hope you will not think me incapable " of partaking of your grief. I have a " mother now eighty-two years of age, " whom therefore I muſt ſoon loſe, unleſs " it pleaſe God that ſhe rather ſhould " mourn for me. I read the letters in

" which

" which you relate your mother's death to
" Mrs. Strahan; and think I do myſelf
" honour when I tell you that I read them
" with tears; but tears are neither to me
" nor to you of any farther uſe, when
" once the tribute of nature has been paid.
" The buſineſs of life ſummons us away
" from uſeleſs grief, and calls us to the
" exerciſe of thoſe virtues of which we
" are lamenting our deprivation. The
" greateſt benefit which one friend can
" confer upon another, is to guard, and
" incite, and elevate his virtues. This
" your mother will ſtill perform, if you
" diligently preſerve the memory of her
" life, and of her death: a life, ſo far
" as I can learn, uſeful and wiſe; inno-
" cent; and a death reſigned, peaceful,

" and holy. I cannot forbear to mention,
" that neither reaſon nor revelation denies
" you to hope, that you may encreaſe her
" happineſs by obeying her precepts; and
" that ſhe may, in her preſent ſtate, look
" with pleaſure, upon every act of virtue
" to which her inſtructions or example
" have contributed. Whether this be
" more than a pleaſing dream, or a juſt
" opinion of ſeparate ſpirits, is indeed
" of no great importance to us, when we
" conſider ourſelves as acting under the
" eye of God: yet ſurely there is ſome-
" thing pleaſing in the belief, that our
" ſeparation from thoſe whom we love is
" merely corporeal; and it may be a
" great incitement to virtuous friendſhip,

" if

" if it can be made probable, that union
" which has received the divine approba-
" tion, ſhall continue to eternity.

" There is one expedient, by which you
" may, in ſome degree, continue her pre-
" ſence. If you write down minutely
" what you remember of her from your
" earlieſt years, you will read it with
" great pleaſure, and receive from it
" many hints of ſoothing recollection,
" when time ſhall remove her yet farther
" from you, and your grief ſhall be ma-
" tured to veneration. To this, how-
" ever painful for the preſent, I can-
" not but adviſe you, as to a ſource of
" comfort and ſatisfaction in the time
" to come: for all comfort and all ſa-

" tisfaction, is ſincerely wiſhed you by,

" Dear Sir,

" Your moſt obliged,

" moſt obedient,

" and moſt humble ſervant,

" SAM. JOHNSON."

To Mr. Elphinſton.

Sept. 25, 1750.

In the hiſtory of literature, the price of copy would be a deſirable piece of information; but to keep this as much in the dark as poſſible, is one of the myſteries of Bookſelling; which, being a lottery throughout, is generally carried on under a maſk. His emoluments from the *Rambler*

bler are therefore not generally known. Some accounts have rated them at two, and others, probably not leſs authentic, at five guineas a week. We are only certain, that from the beginning he retained ſo much of the property in his own hands, till the work was half finiſhed. He then diſpoſed of the copy entirely, but for how much, or under what conditions we are not acquainted. The moment this fact was known in Edinburgh, the tranſlator of the mottos, who had Johnſon's intereſt ſupremely at heart, and not deeming himſelf under any obligation to continue the ſame exertions for the Bookſellers, deſiſted; though he perſeſevered in otherwiſe perfecting the edition.

The truth is, even this performance, one of the moſt maſterly and elegant in the language, was but coldly received at firſt. It was during the publication of the Rambler, that the literary character of *David Hume* broke forth in its ſtrongeſt luſtre. He was the faſhionable writer of the day. He had always kept himſelf independant of Bookſellers. This was a circumſtance which conſiderably encreaſed it with ſome people, as they are pleaſed to diſtinguiſh between an author who writes for ſubſiſtence; and one, who though able to live without writing, yet ſells what he writes with as much anxiety, as if he wrote for a livelihood. This, however, they call a gentleman-author, and, without much regard to the comparative merit of

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the two, very often, and very abſurdly, give him the preference.

Such was the prejudice to which Hume owed much of his celebrity, though his merits undoubtedly entitled him to a very large ſhare. His peculiar excentricities and paradoxes, chiefly on moral, philoſophical, and religious ſubjects, procured him an incredible number of votaries in both kingdoms. Nothing appeared in the literary world, about which he was not conſulted; and it is well known, the critics of the times, regarded his opinion as ſacred and deciſive. He mentioned the Rambler, however, with reſpect; and only regretted there ſhould be ſo much cant and ſo much pedantry, in a performance

replete with taſte, erudition and genius.

This ſtricture very obviouſly marred, though it did not abſolutely prevent the ſucceſs of the book. Johnſon, when told of the fact, only acknowledged himſelf the leſs ſurprized that his papers had not been more univerſally read. *My countrymen*, ſaid he, *will not always regard the voice of a Blaſphemer as an oracle.* He took no farther notice of the circumſtance. Perhaps he might not be altogether inattentive to its influence on the minds of men; in what follows, which is quoted from the laſt number of the Rambler. "I am far "from ſuppoſing, ſays he, that the ceſſa- "tion of my performance will raiſe any "enquiry; for I have never been much

"the

" the favourite of the public, nor can
" boaſt that in the progreſs of my un-
" dertaking, I have been animated by
" the rewards of the liberal, the careſſes
" of the great, or the praiſes of the emi-
" nent.'

Theſe, however, were not the only compoſitions, which occupied the attention of Johnſon in conſort with his Dictionary. During eight years exhauſted in this prodigious work, ſeveral petty pieces made their appearance on different occaſions, and at different times; which ſeverally operated as ſo many advertiſements of that in which he was principally employed, as tending equally to eſtabliſh his reputation and conciliate

the

the public confidence in his future labours.

This publication, which appeared in 1755, was accompanied with a preface, in which it is not eaſy to ſay, whether genius, erudition, induſtry, or taſte is the predominating feature. But on this occaſion he takes an opportunity of ſtating ſome complaints, which, as they chiefly refer to his circumſtances, peculiarly mark the man, in an apology for keeping back his book ſo long from the public; and to defeat the cenſures of the captious, he has this curious paſſage, which gives a ſummary account of his own conduct. "Much of my "life," ſays he, "has been loſt under "the preſſure of diſeaſe. Much has "been

"been trifled away, and much has been "always ſpent in proviſion for the day "that was paſſing over me." The firſt of his complaints is true. He had much ill health. His ſize was large; but he was not more aukward in his gait, than groſs and cumberous in his make. In the earlier periods of his life, he was grievouſly afflicted with the king's evil; but this diſeaſe was much abated, if not perfectly cured, long before his death. But from his infancy to his grave he laboured under a complication of maladies, which repeatedly baffled all the powers of phyſic. Had he failed however in his undertaking, this would rather have condemned the attempt, than juſtified the want of execution.

He

He acknowledged himſelf guilty of trifling away much of his time, and yet his habits of temperance and ſobriety are well known. No man ever imputed diſſipation to Johnſon; but his indolence or averſion to activity, was ſo notorious as to become proverbial. In truth, he never would work, but in order to eat. He has often confeſſed compoſition had no charms for him, and that all the fame and reputation which he acquired by his writings, as well as the numerous and ſublime virtues aſcribed to them, were comprehended in the ſingle monoſyllable *bread.*

The other grievance by which he endeavours to intereſt the feelings of the reader, is, in my opinion, ſingularly whimſical: *much of my life has always*

been

been ſpent, in proviſion for the day that was paſſing over me. This was literally putting his ſituation on a level with that of a mere labourer, whoſe only dependance is on the ſweat of his brow. But it is well known Johnſon received ſo much money, that at the very time of adopting this whining language he was in a capacity to have lived at the rate of three hundred pounds a year.

This was at leaſt no deſpicable competence, for an individual who had no other family to maintain than Mrs. Johnſon and himſelf.

But he adds: "*the Engliſh Dictionary was written amidſt inconvenience and diſtraction, in ſickneſs and in ſorrow.* What thoſe inconveniences and ſorrows thus ſolemnly aſ-

ſerted

ſerted to have interfered with the tranquil purſuits of laborious ſtudy were, he does not inform us. It is however known, that though he never had any children, he was not wholly exempted from domeſtic inquietude. It has been ſaid that Mrs. Johnſon, who was much the elder of the two, had, eſpecially in the latter part of her life, addicted herſelf to drinking, ſome ſay, opium. A ſuſpicion of his conjugal infelicity on this account certainly went abroad, and procured him much commiſeration among his friends: and to the diſguſt occaſioned by this cruel misfortune, his various ſarcaſms on matrimony, his affected indifference to the ſex, and the contempt which he frequently pours on all the expreſſions of the ten-

der

der paſſions, are generally, perhaps improperly, attributed. Mrs. Johnſon was otherwiſe a lady of great ſenſibility and worth; ſo ſhrewd and cultivated, that in the earlier part of their connection, he was fond of conſulting her in all his literary purſuits; and ſo handſome, that his aſſociates in letters and wit were often very pleaſant with him on the ſtrange diſparity, which, in this reſpect, ſubſiſted between huſband and wife. Probably he grew peeviſh by ſtudy and diſeaſe, and he who piqued himſelf on his bluntneſs abroad, was not likely to be very complaiſant at home. She diſliked the profuſion, with which he conſtantly gave away all the money about him; and he found with aſtoniſhment and concern, that whatever

ever he provided or laid up for family exigence, was always gone before he expected.

Notwithſtanding theſe petty differences, they regarded each other with true cordiality and affection. Both ſuffered from oddities, which it was impoſſible to conquer; but mutually repoſed a ſtedfaſt confidence, while it was their happineſs to live together, Johnſon often ſaid he never knew how dear ſhe was to him, till he loſt her. Her death affected him ſo deeply, that he grew almoſt inſenſible to the common concerns of life. He then ſtayed little within, where her image was always recalled by whatever he heard or ſaw. Study diſguſted him, and books

of

of all kinds were equally inſipid. He carefully avoided his friends, and aſſociated moſt with ſuch company as he never ſaw before. And when he thought himſelf a burden, and felt the preſſure of time becoming inſupportable, the only expedient he had was to walk the ſtreets of London. This for many a loneſome night was his conſtant ſubſtitute for ſleep. An impreſſion thus forcible and ſerious, time and viciſſitude only could eraſe. And it was not till he found his mind ſomewhat compoſed, and his heart conſiderably at eaſe, that he began to reliſh the bleſſings of life, to enjoy his friends, and to reſume his ſtudies.

The following plain inſcription to the memory of Mrs. Johnſon, was then

among the first productions of his pen. It is simple and concise, but contains much. Genuine sorrow, is not loquacious. There is something in the original which cannot easily be translated, but the reader may not dislike to see it attempted.

Inscribed on a black marble grave-stone in Bromley Church, Kent.

Hic conduntur reliquiæ
ELIZABETHAE
Antiqua Jarvisiorum gente
Pentlingæ, apud Leicestrienses, ortæ;
Formosæ, culta, ingeniosæ, piæ;
Uxoris, primis nuptiis, Henrici Porter,
Secundis, SAMUELIS JOHNSON,
Qui multum amatum, dinque defletam
Hoc lapide contexit.
Obiit Londin. Mense Mart.
A. D. M,DCC,LIII.

Or

Or, in Engliſh thus:

Here are interred the remains
Of ELIZABETH
Deſcended from the ancient family of JARVIS
Of PENTLING, in the County of Leiceſter;
Beautiful, polite, ingenious, pious;
Wife, by her firſt marriage, of HENRY PORTER,
By her ſecond of SAMUEL JOHNSON,
Who over her much loved and long lamented
Remains
Placed this Stone.
She died in London, in the Month of March,
A. D. M,DCC,LIII.

It was doubted whether the artifices of the bookſellers by practiſing on the public curioſity, would not injure the performance, and raiſe expectation too high to be ſatisfied. The enquiries after the publication were eager and univerſal, and yet the diſappointment which attended the event was inconſi-

derable. It was equally ridiculous in individuals and parties, to expect their diſcriminating prejudices conſulted in the explanation of words. But on no other ground has any ſolid objection been made to the Engliſh Dictionary. It is notwithſtanding attacked in the twelfth number of the North Briton, with as much virulence as if it had been intended only as a regiſter of political opinion.

When Johnſon was firſt told of Wilkes's going to court, in conſequence of his political converſion, he gave a ſtrong proof of the pertinence of his judgment, as well as of the ſtrength of his memory. *I hope*, ſaid he, *Mr. Wilkes is now become a friend to the conſtitution, and to the family on the throne, but I know he has*

has much to unwrite, and more to unſay, before he will be forgiven for what he has been writing and ſaying for many years.

In a compilation which involved ſo much reading, recollection and correction, raſh explanations were unavoidable. The word *Furbelow* he derived originally from *Fur* and *below*, and ſaid it was *fur* ſewed on the lower part of the garment. But the fact was, a lady of diſtinction having once appeared at the French court in this dreſs, which was entirely of her own invention, was aſked what ſhe called it, and anſwered *c' eſt unfalballa*. His definition of the word *oats*, was rigidly juſt, but the ſcurrilous alterations of party rendering the Scotch

at that time extremely ſore, they were much offended, but ſo may all mankind think it a diſgrace to breathe becauſe this is the mode of life in horſes as well as men.

He put ſuch a ſenſe on *penſion* or *penſioners*, as furniſhed petty malignity with a fund of ridicule and ſarcaſm againſt himſelf.

His expoſition of the exciſe was likely to be followed by conſequences ſtill more ſerious and vexatious. Some people then at the head of that obnoxious board, avowed their reſentment in ſuch a manner as to threaten a proſecution.

How this matter terminated is not now generally known. In a ſubſequent edition of the Dictionary, Johnſon was deſired to alter

alter and ſoften the article. *No*, ſaid he, *it has done all the miſchief, and I owe no complaiſance to exciſemen or their maſters.*

Johnſon's connection with Cheſterfield came to an eclairciſſement, the moment this great work made its appearance. *Moore*, author of the World, and the creature of this nobleman, was employed by him to ſound Johnſon on the ſubject of a Dedication. Some time before Johnſon had been refuſed admittance to his Lordſhip. This, it was pretended, happened by the miſtake of a porter, though it is pretty well known, few ſervants take ſuch liberties without the connivance of their maſters. Johnſon, who ſaw through all the diſguiſes of

Chesterfield's pride, never forgave the indignity, and treated every apology which was afterwards suggested by the friends and admirers of this nobleman, as an insult. *Moore*, without touching on that point in the most distant manner, expressed his hopes that Johnson would dedicate his Dictionary to Chesterfield. He received a very pointed and direct negative.—"I am under obligations, said he, "to no great man, and of all others, "Chesterfield ought to know better "than to think me capable of contract-"ing myself into a dwarf, that he may "be thought a giant." You are certainly obliged to his Lordship, said *Moore*, for two very elegant papers in the World, and all the influence of his good opinion, in favour

of

of your work, "You ſeem totally unac-
"quainted with the true ſtate of the fact,
"replied Johnſon, after making a hazard-
"ous and fatiguing voyage round the li-
"terary world, I had fortunately got ſight
"of the ſhore, and was coming into port
"with a pleaſant tide and a fair wind,
"when my Lord Cheſterfield ſends out
"two little cock-boats to tow me in. I
"know my Lord Cheſterfield tolerably
"well, Mr. Moore. He may be a wit
"among Lords, but I fancy he is no
"more than a Lord among wits."

In the year following, he publiſhed the *Political State of Great-Britain*, *Obſervations on the State of Affairs*, and *Propoſals for printing the Dramatic Works of William Shakeſpear*.

His

His political performances diſcover all that ſolid reaſoning and ſound information without which Johnſon never would write on any thing. In theſe, publiſhed in the year fifty-ſix, he diſcuſſes with his uſual penetration and addreſs our political ſituation in the Weſtern world, and enters into the perplexed queſtion, ſo ſtrenuouſly agitated by the Courts of Verſailles and London, concerning the boundaries of the colonies. Both pamphlets are replete with ſhrewdneſs, ſarcaſm, and profound attention to the reſtleſsneſs of ambition, the effects of uſurpation, the arrogant claims of princes, and the natural rights of mankind.

Johnſon, ſo early as the year forty-five, had conceived the deſign of publiſhing a correct

correct edition of Shakeſpear's works. But Warburton, whoſe name was then deſervedly high in the republic of letters, propoſing at the ſame time a ſimilar work, Johnſon prudently ſuſpended his for the preſent. The pamphlet, however, which he printed on the occaſion, received the approbation of his rival, who, of all other men, was the leaſt guilty of adulation. But Warburton ſaw Johnſon's production, and regarded it as the certain preſage of his future eminence. And when that great critic, in the decline of life, was treated with indignity by his contemporaries, Johnſon had the manlineſs to retain his veneration, reſpect and gratitude for him to the laſt.

Having

Having therefore finiſhed the under-taking, which then attracted and commanded the moſt general approbation, he renewed his application to the text of Shakeſpear. The ſcope of this work he delineates at large in a pamphlet which he then publiſhed, and which is compoſed with the author's uſual manlineſs, decency, and elegance. He enumerates, as might be expected, the defects of former editors. Theſe he promiſes to ſupply. He alſo ſpecifies the general ſources of their errors, which he thinks may be rectified.

From the nature of his former labours, and the conſequence which he derived from genius, from induſtry, and from ſucceſs, he preſumes to think himſelf better-qualified to do his author juſtice than moſt

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of thoſe who preceded him. " With re-
" gard to obſolete or peculiar diction," ſays he, " the editor may perhaps claim ſome
" degree of confidence, having had more
" motives to conſider the whole extent of
" our language than any other man from
" its firſt formation. He hopes that, by
" comparing the works of Shakeſpear
" with thoſe of writers who lived at the
" ſame time, immediately preceded, or
" immediately followed him, he ſhall be
" able to aſcertain his ambiguities, diſen-
" tangle his intricacies, and recover the
" meaning of words now loſt in the dark-
" neſs of antiquity."

He adds what muſt give the reader a very juſt and diſtinct idea of the undertaking. " When, therefore, any obſcurity ariſes

" from

" from an alluſion to ſome other book, the
" paſſage will be quoted. When the
" diction is entangled it will be cleared by
" a paraphraſe or interpretation. When
" the ſenſe is broken by the ſuppreſſion
" of part of the ſentiments in pleaſantry
" or paſſion, the connexion will be ſup-
" plied. When any forgotten cuſtom is
" hinted, care will be taken to retrieve or
" explain it. The meaning aſſigned to
" doubtful words will be ſupported by
" the authorities of other writers, or by
" parallel paſſages of Shakeſpear him-
" ſelf."

The only publication in which we find him engaged in the ſubſequent year is the *Idler*, a periodical work, which he owned to a friend, conſiſted chiefly of ſome materials

terials he had gleaned for his Rambler, a few pieces occaſionally ſuggeſted by reading, accident, or converſation, and others reſcued from the fate of volumes in which they had been conſigned to oblivion. He amuſed himſelf by detailing theſe elegant and inſtructive papers in the public prints. They were immediately collected and publiſhed in two volumes, but on what terms is not known. Two eſſays which had not appeared were added, one on the epitaphs of Mr. Pope, and one on the warlike character of our Engliſh ſoldiers. The firſt abounds in falſe criticiſm, the ſecond is little more than the vulgar rhodomontade of a pot-houſe politician, who is always ready to match one of his countrymen

trymen againſt three of any other in the univerſe.

There is a common prejudice in the world againſt ſecond parts. But the *Idler* ought not to be conſidered as a continuation of the Rambler. It ſeems, from the introductory number to have been contrived on quite a different plan. And the character of an *Idler* is ſupported throughout with no inconſiderable ſhare of propriety and ſpirit. Were I diſpoſed to compare the excellence of theſe two valuable performances, I ſhould not heſitate to prefer the *Idler*. The leading idea is not only more original, but it aſſociates a greater variety of ſubjects, in the diſcuſſion of which the author had an opportunity of indulging his own feelings, apologizing

for

for his own habits, and pouring out his mind in ſpeculations the more mature, that his heart as well as his genius, was intereſted; and to ſuch as knew him familiarly it is obvious that he often deſcribes the foibles of his imaginary beings in terms applicable only to his own.

It is not improbable that his *tranſlation of Father Lobo's Voyage to Abyſſinia* contributed to facilitate his acquaintance with the tropical language of the Orientals. His powers of imagination were vigorous and active, and notwithſtanding the truth of his conceptions, he ſeems from the firſt to have been not a little dazzled by ſplendour of expreſſion. The charge of an over-wrought or blown ſtile, which has been ſo frequently, and not altoge-

ther unjuſtly made againſt his writings, might ariſe from this taſte, which all his experience and ſtrength of mind could never finally ſuppreſs.

From the Preface of a work ſo little known, and yet ſo laborious, I cannot reſiſt the pleaſure of preſenting the reader with the following ſhort extract. It exhibits, in my opinion, Johnſon's manner, and ſhews that whatever his improvements afterwards were, his plan of compoſition, his mode of thinking, and his ſuperiority to the prejudices of the vulgar, muſt have been original and unvaried.

" The following relation, ſays he, is ſo " curious and entertaining, and the diſ- " ſertation that accompany it ſo judicious " and inſtructive, that the tranſlator is confident

" confident his attempt ſtands in need of
" no apology, whatever cenſures may fall
" on the performance.

" The Portugueſe traveller, contrary
" to the general vein of his country-
" men, has amuſed his reader with no
" romantic abſurdity or incredible fictions;
" whatever he relates, whether true or
" not, is at leaſt probable; and he who
" tells nothing exceeding the bounds of
" probability, has a right to demand that
" they ſhould believe him, who cannot
" contradict him.

" He appears by his modeſt and un-
" affected narration to have deſcribed
" things as he ſaw them, to have co-
" pied nature from the life, and to have
" conſulted his ſenſes, not his imagina-

" tion; he meets with no baſiliſks that
" deſtroy with their eyes, his croco-
" diles devour their prey without tears,
" and his cataracts fall from the rocks
" without deafening the neighbouring in-
" habitants.

" The reader will here find no regions
" curſed with irremediable barrenneſs, or
" bleſſed with ſpontaneous fecundity, no
" perpetual gloom, or unceaſing ſun-
" ſhine; nor are the nations here deſcrib-
" ed either devoid of all ſenſe of huma-
" nity or conſummate in all private or
" ſocial virtues. Here are no Hottentots
" without religion, polity, or articulate
" language; no Chineſe perfectly polite,
" and completely ſkilled in all ſciences;
" he will diſcover, what will always be

" diſcovered

"discovered by a diligent and impartial "enquirer, that wherever human nature "is to be found, there is a mixture of "vice and virtue; a conteſt of paſſion and "reaſon, and that the Creator doth not "appear partial in his diſtributions, but "has balanced in moſt countries their par- "ticular inconveniences by particular fa- "vours."

It is known to many of the Doctor's friends, that his *Raſſelas or Prince of Abyſſinia*, was an early conception, on which his ideas were matured long before the completion of the work. He ſhewed the firſt lines of it to a Bookſeller, who gave him no encouragement to proceed; but the confidence of genius was not to be

baffled or repreſſed by the cold ſuggeſtions of intereſted ignorance. The ſtroke betrayed the hand of a maſter, but there wanted the taſte of Protogenes to diſcern it. The outlines of this immortal work could not procure the author credit for twenty guineas. His mother was dying of a good old age. He wiſhed to raiſe this ſum that he might be able to ſee her on her death-bed. He ſat down to finiſh his plan, and notwithſtanding his expeditious compoſition, ſhe died before he could make it convenient to viſit her. The forty-firſt number of his Idler probably relates to the circumſtance of her death. The Prince of Abyſſinia was ſold to another Bookſeller, and had a very conſiderable ſale.

We

We are now come to the æra of his pension. It originated with Lord Bute, though the Doctor ſince the odium which attended the adminiſtration of that nobleman, drove him to the ſhades, affected always to give the ſole merit of it to his Majeſty. The manner by which he received it has been detailed eſpecially ſince his death, probably by Mr. Murphy, or ſome one deſirous of publiſhing the concern which he had in the tranſaction. It was owing however entirely to his own merit, without the ſolicitation of a miſtreſs or a player in his favour.* He was not the man who would have owed an obligation to the creature or courtezan of any miniſter on earth.

* Memoirs of G. Anne Bellamy

Johnſon had conceived a ſtrong prejudice againſt Lord Bute. He dined at Mr. Elphinſton's but a few days before the penſion was propoſed. He was there aſked, why he had ſhewn ſuch diſlike to the miniſter; becauſe, ſaid he, he gave the king a wrong education. He had only taught him, added Johnſon, to *draw a tree.*

It was not above a day or two after this that the fact was mentioned in the newſpapers. Mr. Elphinſton haſtened to congratulate his friend on this unexpected acceſſion of good fortune. Johnſon related the matter circumſtantially. Nothing he ſaid could have been given more handſomely. When propoſed to his Majeſty, a certain Lord, whom he would not

name

name, was abundantly ſarcaſtic on his character, and mentioned his political principles as inimical to the Houſe of Hanover. Lord Bute's anſwer was, that if theſe were the Doctor's principles, there was merit in his ſuppreſſing them; that if he had not made an improper uſe of them without any acknowledgement from court, it was not very likely he would, when that ſhould take place, and that it was intended to reward his writings which were before the public, without any regard to ſuch principles as he kept to himſelf.

Johnſon was now in a ſtate of independence; but his habit of literary compoſition was but little enervated, though no longer excited by neceſſity. The work which engroſſed his attention was his long

projected

projected and promiſed edition of Shakeſpear. This in 1765 was publiſhed by ſubſcription, and eſpecially ſince joined to the critical labours of Mr. Steevens, is become a valuable acquiſition to literary criticiſm.

His notes in various parts of the work, his explanation of difficult paſſages, his developement of hidden beauties, his interpretations of obſcurities, and his candour and ingenuity in reconciling inconſiſtencies, diſcover no ſuperficial acquaintance with either men or books. Many think the text not deſerving the commentary, few who are judges think the commentary at leaſt not equal to the text. This is the favourite bard of Engliſhmen, and he owes his immortality to their diſcernment, as in every other nation his abſurdities had probably buried

buried him in oblivion. It was ſaid by one of the Popes, with the uſual decency of profeſſional impoſtors, that a book which required ſo much explanation as the Bible, ought not to have been written. This witticiſm applied to Shakeſpear would be deemed blaſphemy, and yet apart from a few ſplendid paſſages, what do we find in his plays to juſtify their exceſſive popularity, or to give the author that ſuper-eminence which he has ſo long enjoyed on the Engliſh ſtage? Do they ſerve to correct the taſte, improve the heart, enlighten the underſtanding, or facilitate any one purpoſe of public utility. His characters are in fact all monſters, his heroes madmen, his wits buffoons, and his women ſtrumpets, viragos, or idiots.

He

He confounds the relations of things by aiming at no moral object, and for pleaſantry often ſubſtitutes the groſſeſt obſcenity. His creations are as prepoſterons as they are numerous, and whenever he would declaim his thoughts are vulgar, and his expreſſions quaint or turgid or obſcure. He makes Achilles and other illuſtrious characters of antiquity hector like bullies in a brothel, and puts in the mouths of his heroines the ribaldry of Billingſgate. There is not a rule in dramatic compoſition which he does not habitually violate. He is called the poet of nature, and he certainly imitates her deformities with exactneſs, but ſeldom aims at that preference of art which conſiſts in copying her excellence. The

profuſion

profuſion of intemperate praiſe which accompanies his memory indicates much oftener an abject deference for the opinion of the multitude than any real ſenſe of intrinſic merit. And many a reader fancies himſelf charm'd with the beauties, who is only a dupe to the name of an author. Johnſon was not a critic to be miſled by report, while he could have acceſs to the truth. He even ſays, that there is *not one of Shakeſpear's plays which were it now to be exhibited as the work of a co temporary writer, would be heard to the concluſion.* And he ſtates the excellencies and defects of his author in terms ſo equally pointed and ſtrong, that he has run into paradox, where he meant only to be impartial.

From

From the party altercations which diſtinguiſh Britiſh politics, no Engliſhman of a ſpeculative genius can be altogether free. And whatever principles are eſpouſed, one party will always be diſguſted in proportion to the merit with which theſe are aſſerted, illuſtrated, or defended. The abuſe to which his pamphlets in favour of government expoſed him, are to be attributed to this circumſtance. He adopted the miniſterial ſide of the queſtion with all that promptitude of invention, that ardour of genius, that brilliancy of imagination, and that energy of expreſſion which characteriſe his writings. And the *Patriot*, the *Falſe Alarm*, *Falkland Iſland*, and *Taxation no Tyranny*, which were publiſhed

at

at different times from the year 1760 to about 1775, will be read and admired, when the heats which occaſioned them are forgotten.

Prior to the unfortunate failure of Fordyce, Johnſon in company with his friends Hawkſworth and Goldſmith, often viſited that gentleman. An acquaintance conſequently commenced between Johnſon and the Rev. Dr. James Fordyce, ſo well known for his popular talents in the pulpit, and his Sermons to young women. Theſe were ſhown to Johnſon and publiſhed by his advice. He even intereſted himſelf ſo far in the work as to write the title and the advertiſement. The author conſulted him with a becoming confidence, and politely attributed much of the ſuc-

ceſs

ceſs attending that elegant work to his good offices. In truth, Johnſon conceived a very favourable opinion of this reverend gentleman. He owned himſelf fond, he ſaid, of a man, who notwithſtanding the illiberality which ſtill debaſed the literature of his country, had *no dirty hereſies ſticking about him*.

In the ſummer of 1773, he ſet out on a tour to the Hebrides of Scotland. His companion was Mr. Boſwell, to whoſe polite attention and facetious temper he attributes much of the entertainment he received. His account of this journey is written with his uſual attention to men and things, the ideas he conceived of the country, and his ſatyrical turn of thinking. It appeared in 1775, and brought upon

the

the author a world of enemies. He was charged with groſs miſrepreſentation, with conſulting his prejudices where he ought to have conſulted his eyes, and with ſubſtituting for the localities, he affects to point out thoſe only which his cynical opinion had diſguiſed.

But the chief controverſy which this work produced was concerning the authenticity of Oſſian's Poems. This he denies in the moſt unqualified terms, and dares the tranſlator to ſhew his originals. He regarded the whole as an impoſtor, and an inſult on the common ſenſe of mankind, and obſerved, "that to revenge incredulity by re-
"fuſing evidence, is a degree of inſolence
"to which the world is not yet acquainted,
"and ſtubborn audacity is the laſt refuge

" of guilt." This challenge was conceived as indelicate, and reſented, not by an immediate publication of the MSS, but the groſſeſt menaces. The tranſlator's letter to Johnſon on this occaſion was probably not preſerved; it extorted however the following reply:

" Mr. James Macpherſon,

" I received your fooliſh and impudent letter. Any violence that ſhall be attempted upon me I will do my beſt to repel; and what I cannot do for myſelf, the law ſhall do for me; for I will not be hindered from expoſing what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian. What would you have me retract? I thought your work an impoſture;

poſture; I think ſo ſtill; and for my opinion I have given reaſons, which I here dare you to refute. Your abilities ſince your Homer are not ſo formidable; and what I hear of your morality, inclines me to credit rather what you ſhall prove, than what you ſhall ſay.

S. JOHNSON.

This was dictated from memory only, when Johnſon had miſlaid the copy he preſerved of the original, which General Melville has been heard to repeat verbatim, and which is ſaid to be much more pointed. A meeting however was ſo certainly expected between theſe two literary heroes, that for ſome time after Johnſon never

went abroad without a ſtout cudgel, and his antagoniſt it is alſo alledged, was furniſhed with a ſimilar weapon. Whether Macpherſon was aſhamed of his rudeneſs in addreſſing a perſon of Johnſon's age and reſpectability in foul language, or apprehenſive of the conſequences which might reſult from an aſſault, is uncertain, but the matter never went further.

About Chriſtmas, 1774, the Rev. Mr. Shaw was introduced to Johnſon, by the kind offices of Mr. Elphinſton. Shaw being a Highland man, the Doctor interrogated him much on his knowledge of the Erſe, and whether the Poems of Fingal exiſted in that language. The anſwer which Shaw made was, that he

e often had wiſhed, to be clearly aſ-certained of the fact, whether they did or did not. This candour and frankneſs ſtrongly recommended him to Johnſon's notice and friendſhip. He was always pleaſed when he heard him afterwards mentioned with reſpect, and when Dr. Beattie, in a converſation on the Oſſian controverſy, ventured to inſinuate ſomething derogatory to the veracity of this gentleman, Johnſon's anſwer was, "*I never before heard ſo much ſaid* "*againſt Mr. Shaw, and I do not be-* "*lieve it.*"

The preſent Earl of Eglintoun, who has an attachment to the Highlanders, and their language, requeſted of Mr. Shaw, a copy of the MS of his Galic Grammatical

Rules, which was granted him, and Mr. Boſwell having ſeen it in the hands of his Lordſhip, begged leave to lay it before Johnſon, as a proof that the Erſe had not been neglected. It appears that either his Lordſhip had forgotten to mention how he got it, or at leaſt that Mr. Boſwell did not acquaint the Doctor with that circumſtance. For on a morning viſit, Shaw ſoon after paid Johnſon, he was aſked by him if he knew that MS. as it did not appear to be ancient. The Doctor had been peruſing it, and it lay on the table before him. Shaw's name, who had written an Erſe Grammar, was prefixed to the MS. which he therefore told the Doctor was his compoſition, and in his own hand-writing.

Johnſon

Johnſon immediately inſtigated him to publiſh it, and aſſured him the publication would be attended with both profit and reputation. He accordingly introduced him to Mr. Strahan, who printed it, and when he preſented him with a copy, he expreſſed ſatisfaction at the mention he made of Mr. Elphinſton's Engliſh Grammar; and when he came, in peruſing the preface, to the following ſentence, relative to himſelf, "To the advice and encouragement of Dr. Johnſon, the friend of letters and humanity, the public is indebted for theſe ſheets," he, after ſome pauſe ſaid, "Sir, you have treated me handſomely,; *you are an honour to your country.*"

Beſides a natural turn for the ſtudy o language, and the advantages and credit he had now acquired among his countrymen, Shaw turned his thoughts towards making a collection of all the vocables in the Galic language that could be collected from the voice or old books and MSS. Having communicated his idea, in 1778, to the Doctor, and pointed out the difficulties and expence neceſſary to make the tour of Scotland and Ireland, the limited ſale of ſuch a work, and the uncertainty of ſubſcriptions, he replied, that the Scotch ought to raiſe a fund for the undertaking. Application therefore was made to the Highland Club, of which Shaw had been one of the original founders, and which was inſtituted for the purpoſe of encouraging

Galic

Galic enquiries, but he found that by the underhand dealings of Macpherſon and his party, and Shaw's connexion with Johnſon, nothing would be contributed. His diſappointment he ſoon communicated to the Doctor, and ſtill expreſſed the moſt ardent zeal to record the ancient language of his native country: he ſaid he could muſter, of his own property, from two to three hundred pounds towards a journey, and other expences, if he could entertain any hopes of being refunded by the publication. By a ſpeech he made that day on the undertaking, the Doctor fully determined him to ſet of with the ſpring, the concluſion of which was; "*Sir, if you give the world* "*a Vocabulary of that language, while the* "*iſland of Great-Britain ſtands in the At-*

"*lantic*

" *lantic Ocean, your name will be mention-*
" *ed.*" By ſuch a ſpeech, and from ſuch a man, the youthful mind of Shaw went with ardour in purſuit of the objects in queſtion. He performed a journey of 3000 miles, perſevered and finiſhed his work at his own expence, and has not to this day been paid their ſubſcriptions by his countrymen.

Before he ſet out, he laid before the Doctor his plan of collecting and arranging his materials, aſked his advice, and received his directions. He told him, that though he did not implicitly believe what was ſaid in defence of, and againſt the Poems of Oſſian, he, however, at preſent, could bring no proofs to ſubſtantiate the allegations for or againſt them; and that

as

as a ſecondary work, he would do every thing in his power, to collect ſpecimens, if ſuch could be got, at leaſt be in poſſeſſion of facts, if not to ſatisfy the public, to remove all doubts from his own mind, of their ſpuriouſneſs or authenticity; and that he would afterwards talk or write as he could procure evidence. Of this the Doctor highly approved, though it has been ſince aſſerted, that it was previouſly ſettled between them what proofs he ſhould find. But they know little of the man, who can believe ſuch ſcandal; and Shaw ſeems altogether incapable of acting with ſuch diſguiſe.

The ſequel hath verified the ſincerity of their mutual declarations; for the enquiry of the one has confirmed the incredulity

of

of the other. What the Doctor doubted Shaw has proved, and the virulence ſhown by the party for Oſſian againſt Shaw, which has ſince been refuted, is but a freſh proof of the impoſture.

So far was the Doctor intereſted in the ſucceſs and fortunes of his coadjutor in this buſineſs, that he addreſſed him to take orders in the Church of England, but he lived not to ſee him provided for. Upon his going to ſettle in Kent, in 1780, as a curate, the Doctor wrote to Mr. Allen, the Vicar of St. Nicholas, Rocheſter, in his favour, the following letter.

"SIR,

"Mr. William Shaw, the gentleman "from whom you will receive this, is a "ſtudious

"ſtudious and literary man; he is a "ſtranger, and will be glad to be intro- "duced into proper company; and he is "my friend, and any civility you ſhall "ſhew him, will be an obligation on,

"SIR,

"your moſt obedient ſervant,

Signed "SAM. JOHNSON."

The enquiry into the authenticity of Oſſian was publiſhed by his approbation; but he expreſſed his apprehenſions of the treatment that ſucceeded. He read the whole over to Mrs. Williams, as ſhe has been heard to ſay, and ſaid that he was much pleaſed with the proofs adduced of the

the impoſture of Oſſian, and the manner in which he retorted the abuſe and ſcandal which Macnicol poured out in his book againſt him. He gave his advice and aſſiſtance in conducting the argument, and often told Shaw, "*We ſhall prevail in this* "*controverſy.*"

The following letter, occaſioned by Clark's anſwer to Shaw's enquiry, which appeared in ſome of the periodical publications, deſerves preſervation; as it contains ſuch a recapitulation of the ſubject in debate, as gave the Doctor much ſatisfaction.

To

To Doctor SAMUEL JOHNSON.

"SIR,

The controverſy concerning the authenticity of Oſſian's Poems is at laſt decided in your favour. But this detection has produced a ſpirit of revenge as diſgraceful to letters as it is ſhocking to humanity. Thus the vulgar often miſtake for a new ſtar, the blaze of a meteor, whoſe tranſitory ſplendour expires in a ſtench.

It is, however, to you, Sir, the rational admirers of decency and diſpaſſionate criticiſm now look up, with anxiety and ſolicitude, for a vindication of the gentleman, whoſe character, friends, and proſpects have been thus generouſly ſacrificed in defence of truth. He is thought to have written at your inſtigation. It was at leaſt in confidence of your patronage that he thus manfully avowed his convictions. He is of conſequence enough to juſtify even your interference:

rence: nor is innocence beneath the protection of any.

To cruſh the potent combinations raiſed by this conteſt, againſt every thing dear and intereſting to Mr. Shaw, requires the moſt vigorous exertion of no common abilities. The literati of Scotland have, for the moſt part, been duped by the tranſlator of theſe chimerical compoſitions. Their intereſt in the republic of letters, eſpecially in this country, is at preſent very powerful. Some of their moral characters are unfortunately involved in the diſpute. And to ſubſtantiate a proof that the poems in queſtion are only a mere modern fabrication, at once deſtroys their veracity as men, and, as they imagine, deeply affects the honour of the country.

For theſe reaſons, every poſſible effort will naturally be made to re-eſtabliſh the fallen credit of Oſſian. The tranſlator, by every honourable means, no doubt, has at laſt wriggled himſelf

ſelf into parliament, and the Highland clergy will be aſſiduous to ſerve him, in proportion as they may now ſuppoſe it in his power to return the obligation. Your ſilence, Sir, whil eall Grub-ſtreet is in an uproar, in a matter which originated with you, will conſequently be attended with a new eruption of forgeries, from the ſame lying ſpirit that has already belched up ſo many. Theſe, another freſh abettor of Oſſian's ghoſt will readily detail, in all the ribaldry of detraction, and all the malignant acrimony of diſappointment. And poor Shaw may adopt for his eternal motto,

——A barbarous noiſe environs me,
Of owls and cuckows, aſſes, apes, and dogs!

If a bliſtered tongue be the moſt infallible ſymptom of a diſeaſed ſtomach, the caſe of his patients ſurely demand the moſt immediate preſcriptions of a maſter.

Malice and Scotch cunning are ſurely united, and exerted againſt this unfortunate Enquirer,

in a moſt extraordinary degree. The man, like Job in another caſe, is, in one moment robbed of his all. As a ſcholar, a gentleman, a poet, or a preacher, he affords his old Scotch acquaintance only a little ridicule or a vulgar ſarcaſm. His literary talents are denied, and he is conſidered as a man, equally deſtitute of letters, decency, and decorum. Yet Clark, who pronounces thus cavalierly on his ignorance, with almoſt the ſame breath, acknowledges himſelf indebted to his criticiſm. Strange John Clark, to confeſs yourſelf corrected in your favourite Celtic ſtudy, by one whom you tell us, ſo often and ſo roundly, knows nothing about the matter.

It might well be ſuſpected that he who compoſed both a grammar and a dictionary, under the patronage of the firſt lexicographer perhaps in Europe, would probably be deemed by the impartial part of mankind, not altogether incompetent to the taſk. To render the victory deciſive, it

it was therefore neceſſary, as far as the blackeſt aſperſions and moſt contemptible inſinuations could go, to ruin his moral reputation. They foreſaw his knowledge of the ſubject could have no weight, but in proportion to his credit with the public. This once deſtroyed, the argument would neceſſarily be their own.

In ſhort, theſe Scotch literati ſeem to hang together in palming theſe noſtrums on the public, like ſo many jugglers, equally concerned in the ſucceſs of ſome common trick, and Mr. Shaw, for having relinquiſhed his ſhare in the plot, is hooted by the whole honourable fraternity as a traitor. To render his criminality for this unpardonable treachery ſtill more enormous, his religious is claſſed with his literary apoſtacy, and both ſtated as irrefragable evidences that he is utterly deſtitute of principle. And ſuch is the general provocation which his alacrity and adroitneſs in this buſineſs have given, that he would probably run the ſame riſque on appear-

ing once more in the Highlands of Scotland, with the man, who, after turning King's evidence, ſhould have the temerity to re-viſit the cells of Newgate.

It ſeems therefore incumbent on you, Sir, to ſtate the facts at large, which firſt led you to a diſcovery of this monſtrous impoſition, to reſcue your Gallic coadjutor from the odium incurred by eſpouſing your cauſe, to enter your proteſt againſt proſtituting a polemical diſcuſſion to illiberal invective and virulent detraction, and to account to the public for their conduct, who, under pretence of vindicating a very frivolous truth, have eſſentially injured the moſt important virtues. Leaving Mr. Shaw to ſtruggle thus, in a conteſt commenced by you, will be conſidered by your joint opponents, as a damning proof of his delinquency; of their ſurmiſes, in your ſuffering yourſelf to be impoſed on by his artifice; and of your yielding to the weight of their accumulated

cumulated virulence againſt him, after defying all that ſophiſtry could do againſt yourſelf.

ANTI-OSSIAN.

In conſequence of this letter, had Johnſon's health permitted him, during the laſt ſix months, he intended to have drawn out and publiſhed a ſtate of the controverſy from the beginning, to balance the arguments and evidence on both ſides, and to pronounce judgment on the whole. This is a piece of criticiſm now loſt, and much to be lamented, as the queſtion concerning the poems attributed to Oſſian, from the illiberal conſtruction put on his opinion of their au-

thenticity, intereſted him as materially as any circumſtance of his life.

Though the following letter came into the Editor's hands too late to be inſerted in the proper place, it muſt not be ſuppreſſed, as it is the firſt Mr. Elphinſton received from the Doctor, and ſhews how long a correſpondence of the moſt liberal and friendly nature, has ſubſiſted between them.

To Mr. ELPHINSTON.

"SIR,

I have for a long time intended to anſwer the Letter which you were pleaſed to ſend me, and know not why I have delayed it ſo long; but that I had nothing particular, either of inquiry or information, to ſend you: and the ſame reaſon

reaſon might ſtill have the ſame conſequence; but that I find in my recluſe kind of Life, that I am not likely to have much more to ſay, at one time than another, and that therefore I may endanger by an appearance of neglect, long continued, the loſs of ſuch an Acquaintance as I know not where to ſupply. I therefore write now to aſſure you how ſenſible I am of the kindneſs you have always expreſſed to me, and how much I deſire the cultivation of that Benevolence, which, perhaps, nothing but the diſtance between us has hindered from ripening before this time into Friendſhip. Of myſelf I have very little to ſay, and of any body elſe leſs: let me, however, be allowed one thing, and that in my own favour; that I am,

Dear Sir,

Your moſt humble ſervant,

April 20, 1749. SAM. JOHNSON."

In the year 1778, as appears from the date of the following, his friend, Mr. Elphinſton became a widower. Johnſon, who had long known the exquiſite ſenſibility of his nature, entered into all his ſympathies with his uſual tenderneſs. And it is impoſſible to read his conſolatory epiſtle on that occaſion, without ſharing that amiable philanthropy which he then felt, and which formed a very diſtinguiſhing trait in his character.

To Mr. ELPHINSTON.

"SIR,

Having myſelf ſuffered what you are now ſuffering, I well know the weight of your diſtreſs, how much need you have of comfort, and how little comfort

comfort can be given. A loſs, ſuch as yours, lacerates the mind, and breaks the whole ſyſtem of purpoſes and hopes. It leaves a diſmal vacuity in life, which affords nothing on which the affections can fix, or to which endeavour may be directed. All this I have known, and it is now, in the viciſſitude of things, your turn to know it.

But in the condition of mortal beings, one muſt loſe another. What would be the wretchedneſs of life, if there was not ſomething always in view, ſome Being, immutable and unfailing, to whoſe mercy man may have recourſe. Τὸν πρῶτον κινοῦντα ἀκίνητον.

Here we muſt reſt. The greateſt Being is the moſt benevolent. We muſt not grieve for the dead as men without hope, becauſe we know that they are in his hands. We have, indeed, not leiſure to grieve long, becauſe we are haſtening to follow them. Your race and mine have

have been interrupted by many obſtacles, but we muſt humbly hope for an happy end.

I am, Sir,

Your moſt humble ſervant,

Signed SAM. JOHNSON."

July 27, 1778.

The Lives of the Poets is one of his greateſt, and perhaps was the beſt finiſhed of his works. It was undertaken ſo late as the year 1778. The deſign, originally, was only to have given a general character of each author, and to have fixed, as nearly as poſſible, the period of publication. But the ſubject was too fertile and pleaſing to be thus briefly diſmiſſed. The bookſellers agreed to give him two hundred

hundred pounds for no more than this, but his genius expanded with the rich fields that opened to his view, and facts accumulated in proportion as he continued the ſearch.

He was engaged in this performance by a very general concurrence in the trade, to defeat the project which had been conceived of abridging their monopoly. This was the plan of Mr. Bell, who printed the Engliſh poets at, what he called, the Apollo preſs. His edition was cheap and diminutive, but elegant and likely to be popular. The booksellers were in hopes, the high reputation of Johnſon, would, by this undertaking, prove a protection to what they deemed their property.

The

The only thing to be feared was the declenſion of thoſe abilities, on which they depended, as he was now arrived at a very advanced age. But he ſoon convinced them and the public, that notwithſtanding the diſeaſe and infirmities to which he was reduced, his intellects were ſtill unimpaired. His account of the metaphyſical poets, his Memoirs of Dryden, and eſpecially his Critique on Paradiſe Loſt, are, in my opinion, among the happieſt efforts of his pen, and written with all the beauty and elegance of which our language is ſuſceptible.

Thus, by a moſt fortunate choice of his ſubjects, has this great man in giving at once ſtability to our tongue, and formation to our taſte, eſtabliſhed a baſis for his

own

own fame, which ſhall laſt while a veſtige of the one or the other remains.

From this period, the ceſſation of all his labours, the public ſeemed anxious about his preſervation, in proportion as it every day became more and more certain that they muſt ſoon loſe him. He was conſequently, in the evening of his days particularly, an object of univerſal attention and enquiry. The progreſs of his declining health has accordingly been traced in every account hitherto preſented of his life and literary purſuits, with a minute and tireſome exactneſs.

In the year 1783 he was attacked by a ſtroke of the palſey, which deprived him for ſome time of the power of ſpeech. But by the aſſiduity of Dr. Hebberden and

Dr.

Dr. Brocklesby, his usual physicians, he was soon recovered to his wonted state of ill health.

In the month of December of the same year, a club was instituted at the Essex-Head, chiefly on his account, and by several individuals who wished to monopolize his company. He composed rules for its regulation, and seemed to enjoy it while he could give his attendance; but his infirmities continued to increase, and the constant evacuations to which he was subjected by an asthmatic habit, terminated in a dropsy, which in the spring of 1784, confined him some months.

It was now his friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, conceiving that the genial climate of Italy might help to cherish or eke out a life

a life thus dear to him, and to mankind, ſignified to the Lord Chancellor how ſeaſonable and acceptable, for that purpoſe, two hundred a year more would prove to the Doctor. His lordſhip did not heſitate a moment in mentioning the circumſtance in its proper place. But Johnſon never was a courtier. Other claims and on other accounts were more preſſing. Though the greateſt princes in the world would have been glad to confer an obligation on ſuch a man, the neceſſities of his ſituation were overlooked. The preſent is neither an age nor a government, in which merit like his can expect more than bare encouragement.

The Chancellor however found means to acquaint him, in the moſt delicate manner, that

that five hundred pounds at his banker's was at his ſervice, and he ſhould think it money well laid out, if in any degree it contributed to his convenience. Johnſon's letter on this unexpected occaſion, though one of his laſt, is not the leaſt happy of his productions.

The Right Hon. the Lord Chancellor.

MY LORD,

"AFTER a long and not inattentive obſervation on mankind, the generoſity of your lordſhip's offer raiſes in me no leſs wonder than gratitude. Bounty ſo liberally beſtowed I ſhould gladly receive if my condition made it neceſſary; for to ſuch a mind who would not be proud to own his obligations? But it hath pleaſed God to reſtore me to ſuch a meaſure of health, that if I ſhould now

now appropriate ſo much of a fortune deſtined to do good, I could not eſcape from myſelf the charge of advancing a falſe claim. My journey to the Continent though I once thought it neceſſary, was never much encouraged by my phyſicians, and I was very deſirous that your lordſhip ſhould be told of it by Sir Joſhua Reynolds, as an event very uncertain; for if I ſhould grow much better I ſhould not be willing, and if much worſe I ſhould not be able to migrate.

"Your Lordſhip was firſt ſolicited without my knowledge; but when I was told that you was pleaſed to honour me with your patronage, I did not expect to hear of a refuſal; yet as I have had no long time to brood hope, and have not rioted in imaginary opulence, this cold reception has been ſcarce a diſappointment; and from your lordſhip's kindneſs I have received a benefit which men like you are able to beſtow.

I ſhall now live *mihi carior*, with a higher opinion of my own merit.

I am, my Lord,

Your Lordſhip's moſt obliged,

Moſt grateful,

And moſt humble Servant,

S. JOHNSON.

To the Right Honourable
the Lord Chancellor.
Sept. 1784.

No event ſince the deceaſe of Mrs. Johnſon ſo deeply affected him as the very unaccountable marriage of Mrs. Thrale. This woman he had frequently mentioned as the ornament and pattern of her ſex. There was no virtue which ſhe did not practiſe, no feminine accompliſhment of which

which ſhe was not a miſtreſs; hardly any language or ſcience, or art which ſhe did not know. Theſe various endowments he conſidered as ſo many collateral ſecurities of her worth. They conciliated his confidence at leaſt in what he thought ſhe was. He conſequently entertained a ſincere friendſhip for her and her family. But her apoſtacy appeared to him an inſult on his diſcernment, and on all thoſe valuable qualities for which he had given her ſo much credit. The uneaſineſs and regret which he felt on this occaſion was ſo very pungent, that he could not conceal it even from his ſervants. From that time he was ſeldom obſerved to be in his uſual eaſy good humours. His ſleep and appetite, and the ſatisfaction he took in his ſtudy,

obviouſly foſook him. He even avoided that company which had formerly given him the greateſt pleaſure. He often was denied to his deareſt friends, who declined mentioning her name to him, and till the hour of his death he could not wholly diſmiſs her from his thoughts.

His dying moments were replete with that piety which adorned his life. The approaches of death ſhocked him to a certain degree, becauſe he did not affect to conceal what he felt. Serenity or fortitude in ſuch an awful ſituation, is the gift of few minds. He died in the full conviction of an eternal world, and the important realities of futurity, were conſequently regarded by him with proportionable diffidence and ſolicitude.

A few

A few days before his deceaſe he ſent for Sir Joſhua Reynolds, and told him that he had three favours to aſk of him. Sir Joſhua, confiding in the Doctor's good ſenſe and diſcretion, frankly promiſed an implicit compliance with his requeſt. The firſt was, that though he owed Sir Joſhua thirty pounds, he was not to expect to be repaid. This was readily granted. The ſecond demand was that Sir Joſhua ſhould not paint on Sundays. To this a ſmall degree of heſitation appeared, but however no poſitive objection was made. He deſired as his third and laſt requeſt that he would regularly every day read more or leſs of the ſcriptures; Sir Joſhua bogled moſt at this, but the Doctor aſſuming much earneſtneſs, told him how much he

had it at heart, and hoped Sir Joſhua's pledging himſelf to a dying friend might inſure the literal and punctual performance of a duty, which would for certain be attended with the beſt effects, promiſed to comply.

The diſpoſitions he made in his laſt will have been variouſly conſtrued. And ſome have blamed him much for treating his poor relations ſo harſhly, by leaving his whole property almoſt to ſtrangers. He conſulted however his own feelings, and we know not his principles ſufficiently to judge of his motives.

He was uniformly through life anxious to communicate happineſs to all about him. He had innumerable penſioners. His houſe, eſpecially in the latter part of his

his life, was an asylum for the indigent and well deserving. It was crouded for years with aged invalids of both sexes. Mrs. Williams, the blind woman, lodged with him from Mrs. Johnson's death till within a few years of his own. He has celebrated Mr. Leveret in a beautiful copy of verses to his memory. He had an annual feast for a numerous collection of old ladies whom he knew, and to whom on this occasion, he always gave his company in preference to any other engagement.

About seven o'clock on Monday evening, the 13th of December, 1785, this great and worthy individual expired in the 75th year of his age without a groan.

groan. And perhaps he left few behind him either of equal goodneſs, ability or reputation.

In eſtimating the real merit of this elegant and maſterly writer, it may be neceſſary to attend not ſo much to what he knew as to what he communicated. His moſt intimate friends could obtain but a partial acquaintance with the former, the public are in full poſſeſſion of the latter. It ſeems of very little conſequence how the fountain is ſupplied, while the ſtream preſerves its fulneſs and its purity. The genius of Johnſon from whatever ſource he drew his information, whether his acquaintance

quaintancewith philoſophy or philology was ſolid or ſuperficial, or whether he was a man of ſcience or only a mere lexicographer, abounded with originality on every ſubject which occupied his attention. His writings are not theoretical, but he often elucidates general knowledge without obſcuring his ſtile by technical phraſeology. How then ſhall the ſcience of an author, who attaches himſelf to no particular one, be decided. To infer his ignorance of ſpecific qualities, from his acquaintance with that alone which involves them, is like upbraiding the philoſopher who ſtudies the principles of mechanics becauſe he is not a wheelwright, or a watchmaker. Examine all his alluſions in his *Ramblers*, his *Idlers*, and his *Lives*, and

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let his ſcience be eſtimated in the ſame proportion as theſe are adopted with propriety. What is it that has thus enriched his ſtile, and rendered all his details ſo much more intereſting and original than thoſe of moſt other authors. Is it not the ſolid and profound reflections of a ſagacious, diſcriminating, and well-informed mind? In fact, it was by paſſing through this intelligent medium, that his various and literal communications accumulated all their value and importance, and what he has ſaid of Dryden, applies with peculiar propriety to himſelf. *His works abound with knowledge and ſparkle with illuſtrations. There is ſcarcely any ſcience or faculty that does not ſupply him with occaſional images and lucky ſimilitudes; every*

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page discovers a mind very widely acquainted both with art and nature, and in full possession of great stores of intellectual wealth.

To a mind thus manured in learning, science, and knowledge of the world, Johnson added such amplitude of wit as answered all the purposes of petulance, malignity, and amusement. It is however not a little singular, that with a bluntness of address, and a coarseness of colloquial expression peculiarly characteristic, he was equally without humour and superior to every species of buffoonery. All his ideas, in whatever terms he chose to exhibit them, were brilliant, original and correct. He was a painter who seldom dealt in sketches. His pictures might be sometimes

ſometimes prepoſterous or fanciful, and not unfrequently monſtrous for deformity, but were generally finiſhed. He poſſeſſed in an eminent degree the talent of elevating the converſation by an exuberance of claſſical and intereſting ſentiment, but in the courſe of a long life, and in the enjoyment of a numerous and poliſhed acquaintance, gave few ſpecimens of thoſe elegant and ſocial pleaſantries which are often to be found in the company of the learned and polite. With a large ſhare of good-nature he could occaſionally be unpardonably ſevere, and he never was more entertaining than when he gave a looſe to the ſarcaſtic propenſity of his nature at the expence of ſome character abſent or preſent. The moment he found himſelf the idol of faſhion,

faſhion, his conceit of his own powers was without reſtraint or decency. He arrogated the diſtinction of Dictator in all companies, delivered his opinions with oracular promptitude and deciſion, and ſpurned with impatience and ſcorn the moſt delicate contradiction. His reſpect for no party, ſex, or individual, when the fit of talking had once ſeized him, could either qualify or ſuppreſs a favourite paradox, a rude jeſt, or a bold apothegm. His witticiſms were rather ſtrong and pointed, than exquiſitely fine and charming, and more calculated to render us diſſatisfied with what we cannot help, than by a group of agreeable aſſociations to excite our gratitude for what we may ſtill enjoy. No man ever diſcovered more humanity

or

or diſcovered it in a manner leſs capable of diſguiſe than he did. His heart was in uniſon with every thing that could ſuffer. He had no equal in affording conſolation to the ſorrowful. Pity always made him ſerious, and he never deemed that an object of mirth which tended by any means whatever to impair the happineſs of ſociety. He had no levity of his own, and was ſo far from reliſhing it in others, that he never met with a facetious character in his life which he did not either deſpiſe or treat with incivility. In ſhort, his genius was fettered by melancholy and caprice, he was fond of appearing ſententious and diſpaſſionate and correct, and even his moſt ſprightly ridicule was generally tinged with reflection and ſolemnity.

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The anecdotes which have been told of him are endleſs. For many he is doubtleſs obliged to the fabrications of his friends, as well as his enemies. Report, for a ſeries of years, has given him the credit for moſt of the beſt things that have attracted public attention. Some of theſe appear only an improvement of others, the ſecond edition of what did not pleaſe him in the firſt, or an echo to ſayings of which no trace probably remained on his memory but the ſound. Whoever would make an accurate collection of them muſt inviolably adhere to arrangement. A great variety were dropt originally in Bookſellers ſhops, were he always lounged away much of his time, with a few literary and ſcientific men, whoſe intimacy and converſation

tion it was his ambition to cultivate; and among people of faſhion and diſtinction, of whoſe attentions, adulation, and friendſhip he grew immoderately fond in the latter periods of his life.

Long before he broached the idea of his Dictionary, or any other work which chiefly contributed to raiſe and eſtabliſh his literary reputation, he was much with a Bookſeller of eminence, who frequently conſulted him about manuſcripts offered for ſale, or books newly publiſhed. But whenever Johnſon's opinion happened to differ from his, he would ſtare Johnſon full in the face, and remark with much gravity and arrogance, *I wiſh you could write as well.* This Johnſon thought was literally telling a profeſſional man that he

he was an impoſtor, or that he aſſumed a character to which he was not equal. He therefore heard the groſs imputation once or twice with ſullen contempt. One day, however, in the preſence of ſeveral gentlemen, who knew them both, this bookſeller very incautiouſly threw out the ſame illiberal opinion. Johnſon could ſuppreſs his indignation no longer. *Sir*, ſaid he, *you are not competent to decide a queſtion which you do not underſtand. If your allegations be true, you have the brutality to inſult me with what is not my fault, but my misfortune. If your allegation be not true, your impudent ſpeech only ſhews how much more deteſtable a liar is than a brute.* The ſtrong concluſive aſpect and ferocity of manner which accompanied the utterance

of theſe words, from a poor author to a purſe-proud Bookſeller, made a deep impreſſion in Johnſon's favour, and ſecured him, perhaps, more reſpect and civility in his ſubſequent intercourſe with the trade than any other tranſaction of his life.

Goldſmith, who hated the prudery of Johnſon's morals, and the foppery of Hawkſworth's manners, yet warmly admired the genius of both, was in uſe to ſay among his acquaintance, that Johnſon would have made a *decent monk*, and Hawkſworth *a good dancing maſter*.

Johnſon often took his revenge. He had ſarcaſms at will for all perſons, and all places. One evening theſe two wits were in company with Mrs. Thrale, and a large aſſemblage of fine women: Goldſmith

ſmith, who was the moſt aukward creature imaginable in ſuch a ſituation, overturned the tea-things as the ſervant preſented him with his diſh. He was ſpeechleſs; and the ladies, after ſtaring at each other, burſt into a fit of laughter. Johnſon only continued grave, and turning to Mrs. Thrale, *Madam*, ſaid he, *can you tell how a man who ſhocks ſo much in company, can give ſo many charms to his writings?*

Johnſon is ſaid never to have forgiven a lady, then preſent, who whiſpered to Mrs. Thrale in a voice loud enough to be heard through the whole room, *Theſe gentlemen publiſh ſo much delicacy, that they reſerve none for private uſe.*

But whatever may be thought of his genius, his ſcience, or his wit, the benevolence, the ſerioufneſs and the religious tendency of his moral productions are eminent and inconteſtible. He never made any attempt in hiſtorical compoſition. In other walks of literature he had few ſuperiors, and he was undoubtedly one of the moſt popular authors of the preſent age. His regards for religion were ſacred and inviolable. Thoſe virtues and qualities which adminiſter to the decency and felicity of life, derived from his pen peculiar aid and illuſtration. He was the friend and advocate of whatever enlarges, heightens, refines, or perfects the happineſs of humanity. To this great and pre-

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vailing object all his labours had an immediate reference, and his whole life in public and private was consecrated to the welfare and the honour of the species.

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Author believed to be
Rev. William Shaw
(see Austin Dobson's
essay & Boswell's
Predecessors & Editors)
see also Boswell's "Life"
Vol III p 106/7
" IV p 252

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